





## Structure Modification of Cinnamic Acid to (E)-1-(3,4-dihydroisoquinoline-2(1H)-yl)-3-phenylprop-2-en-1-one and Antioxidant Activity Test by DPPH Method

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### Abstract

Antioxidants can protect cells from free radical damage by stabilizing them. One of the compounds that has antioxidant activity is cinnamic acid. Cinnamic acid and its derivatives have several activities: antibacterial, anticancer, and antioxidant. However, the ability of cinnamic acid to capture free radicals is still relatively low. One of the efforts that can be made to increase the antioxidant activity of cinnamic acid is to modify its structure. Structure modification is an effort to improve the pharmacological activity of a compound through chemical synthesis reactions. The cinnamic acid structure can be modified by changing the carboxylic -OH group into an amine group through an N-atom acylation reaction. This study was conducted by reacting cinnamoyl chloride (**1a**), which is a cinnamic acid derivative with 1,2,3,4-tetrahydroisoquinoline (**2b**) which is a compound of isoquinoline group to produce (E)-1-(3,4-dihydroisoquinoline-2(1H)-yl)-3-phenylprop-2-en-1-one (**3b**) and then tested for antioxidant activity using DPPH method. The resulting product compound was yellow crystals with a yield of 81.56%. The antioxidant activity produced by the product is more significant than that of cinnamic acid compounds at the same concentration.

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## INTRODUCTION

Free radicals, highly reactive species with unpaired electrons, can cause oxidative stress when produced in excess. The human body possesses defense mechanisms, including enzymes like glutathione peroxidase, catalase, and superoxide dismutase, to counteract free radical damage<sup>1,2</sup>. However, oxidative stress, resulting from an imbalance between free radical production and elimination, is implicated in various serious health conditions, including cancer, atherosclerosis, aging, immunosuppression, inflammation, ischemic heart disease, diabetes, and neurological disorders<sup>3</sup>.

Antioxidants, substances capable of neutralizing free radicals by donating electrons, play a crucial role in protecting cells from oxidative damage<sup>3</sup>. Cinnamic acid, a compound commonly used as a food flavoring agent, exhibits antioxidant properties<sup>4,6</sup>. Its unsaturated double bonds facilitate hydrogen atom donation, neutralizing free radicals. However, cinnamic acid's antioxidant activity is relatively limited. Structure modification represents a promising strategy to enhance its antioxidant capacity<sup>7,8</sup>.

Structure modification, a key drug development strategy, involves chemically altering existing compounds to enhance their pharmacological activity<sup>9,10</sup>. The cinnamic acid scaffold, characterized by its carboxylic OH group, offers opportunities for modification through N-atom acylation to produce novel derivatives. Tetrahydroisoquinoline compounds hold significant

promise in bioorganic chemistry and medicine. This scaffold has been widely explored in pharmaceutical research, demonstrating diverse biological activities including anti-inflammatory, neurotropic, antibiotic, antipsychotic, antituberculosis, estrogenic receptor blocker, and antioxidant properties<sup>11,12</sup>. The detrimental effects of reactive oxygen species (ROS) on cellular macromolecules have fueled research efforts to develop novel antioxidant compounds<sup>13,14</sup>. To counteract oxidative damage, extensive investigations have been conducted to identify and characterize potential antioxidants.

In this study, we concentrated on the design, synthesis, characterization, and evaluation of the antioxidant activity of the newly cinnamic acid-tetrahydroisoquinoline hybrid compound. The structures of the synthesized compounds were verified based on FTIR and <sup>1</sup>H-NMR spectral data. The structural combination of cinnamic acid and tetrahydroisoquinoline is expected to increase the antioxidant activity of cinnamic acid as the lead compound.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Materials

The synthesis of target compound involved the use of cinnamoyl chloride (Sigma-Aldrich), 1,2,3,4-tetrahydroisoquinoline (Sigma-Aldrich), triethylamine (Merck), tetrahydrofuran (Merck), and ethyl acetate (Merck). Purification was achieved using *n*-hexane and distilled water. Analytical techniques included melting point determination (using a melting point tester), Fourier-Transform Infrared spectroscopy (FTIR; Shimadzu), thin-layer chromatography-densitometry (TLC-densitometry; Camag), and nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy (NMR; JEOL Resonance).

### Methods

#### Synthesis of target compound

(*E*)-1-(3,4-dihydroisoquinoline-2(1H)-yl)-3-phenylprop-2-en-1-one (**3b**) was synthesized via a condensation reaction between cinnamoyl chloride (**1a**) and 1,2,3,4-tetrahydroisoquinoline (**2b**) using triethylamine as a catalyst (**Figure 1**). Cinnamoyl chloride (0.004 mol, 0.67 g) and 1,2,3,4-tetrahydroisoquinoline (0.008 mol, 1.07 g) were combined in an ice bath under stirring conditions (220 rpm). Triethylamine (0.008 mol, 0.81 g) was added as a catalyst. The reaction was monitored by TLC and terminated when the cinnamoyl chloride spot disappeared. The reaction mixture was quenched with a saturated sodium bicarbonate solution followed by 50 mL of distilled water. The precipitated product was filtered using a Buchner funnel. The crude product was recrystallized from hot methanol. Recrystallized crystals were filtered using a Buchner funnel and washed with 10 mL of methanol (twice). The final product was dried in an oven at a constant temperature of 50°C. The yield of the synthesized compound was determined by weighing the dried product.

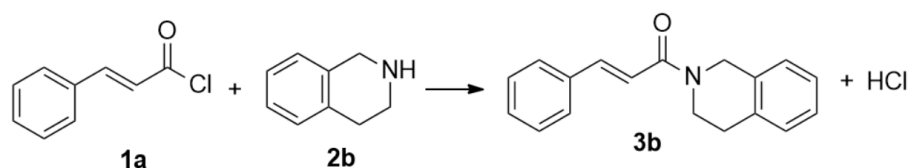


Figure 1. The synthetic route to a target compound (**3b**).

#### Optimization of reaction time and eluent

Reaction progress was monitored using TLC. Five aliquots were taken from the reaction mixture at specific time points (0, 1, 2, 3, and 4 hours). To optimize the TLC separation, four different eluent systems were evaluated. The comparisons are presented in **Table I**.

Table I. Comparison of eluents for optimization.

Eluent code	Eluent	Comparison
A	<i>n</i> -hexane : ethyl acetate	10 : 1
B	<i>n</i> -hexane : ethyl acetate	1 : 1
C	<i>n</i> -hexane : ethyl acetate : acetone	10 : 1 : 5
D	<i>n</i> -hexane : ethyl acetate : acetone	7 : 1 : 5

## Data analysis

### Organoleptic test

Visual assessment of the product's shape and color was conducted as part of the organoleptic evaluation.

### Product compound purity test: melting range test

The melting point of the sample was determined using a capillary tube method. A small amount of the sample was packed into a capillary tube, which was then inserted into the melting point apparatus. The portion of the tube containing the sample was positioned in the center of the apparatus. The temperature was gradually increased, and the melting point was recorded as the temperature at which the sample transitioned from a solid to a liquid state.

### Product compound purity test: TLC-densitometry

Thin-layer chromatography was employed to assess the purity of the sample solution. A small amount of the sample was applied to a TLC plate, and the developed chromatogram was visually inspected. The presence of a single spot indicates a pure compound. To further confirm purity, densitometric analysis was performed<sup>15</sup>.

### Target compound identification: FTIR

The spectra were recorded using the KBr pellet technique in a Shimadzu spectrometer. The pellets were prepared by mixing 1.5-2 mg of **3b** with 350 mg of KBr. The 13 mm diameter pellets were prepared in a standard device<sup>16</sup>.

### Target compound identification: <sup>1</sup>H-NMR

Samples were dissolved in CDCl<sub>3</sub> within NMR tubes. <sup>1</sup>H-NMR spectroscopy was conducted using a JEOL RESONANCE 400 MHz spectrometer. The NMR parameters adhered to the protocols established by Kornberger *et al.*<sup>17</sup> in their previous research.

### Antioxidant test using DPPH method

Stock solutions of the target compound (**3b**) and cinnamic acid were prepared at a concentration of 1000 ppm in methanol. Working solutions were then prepared by diluting the stock solutions to concentrations of 100 ppm and 500 ppm using methanol. A 0.1 mM 2,2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl (DPPH) solution was prepared in methanol. The DPPH solution was stored in a dark bottle to prevent photodegradation.

The antioxidant activity of **3b** and cinnamic acid solutions was determined using the DPPH free radical scavenging assay. Aliquots (0.2 mL) of each test solution at varying concentrations were mixed with 0.8 mL of DPPH solution. The mixture was then incubated for 30 minutes at room temperature in darkness. Absorbance measurements were recorded at 516 nm using a UV-Vis spectrophotometer<sup>18</sup>.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Synthesis of target compound

Compound **3b** was synthesized via a nucleophilic acyl substitution reaction between **1a** and **2b**. The reaction mechanism proceeds through two stages: nucleophilic addition to the carbonyl group and subsequent chloride ion elimination (**Figure 2**)<sup>19</sup>. Triethylamine served as a base to deprotonate intermediate species, facilitate HCl removal, and catalyze the reaction<sup>20</sup>. Tetrahydrofuran was selected as the solvent due to its aprotic nature, which enhances the reaction by minimizing hydrogen bond formation. THF's water solubility facilitates solvent removal through washing<sup>21</sup>. The overall yield of compound **3b** was 81.56%.

### Optimization of reaction time and eluent

Reaction optimization revealed that compound **3b** was formed immediately upon mixing of starting materials (**Figure 3**), indicating an instantaneous reaction. Therefore, a reaction time of zero hours was determined to be optimal. The selected eluent system, consisting of *n*-hexane and ethyl acetate in a 1 : 1 ratio (eluent B), demonstrated excellent chromatographic separation, as evidenced by the absence of overlapping spots on the TLC plate (**Figure 4**)<sup>22</sup>. This eluent system effectively

separated compounds with R<sub>f</sub> values within the desired range of 0.2-0.8<sup>23,24</sup>. The R<sub>f</sub> value of the target compound, **3b**, was determined to be 0.71 using eluent B, confirming its suitability for the separation.

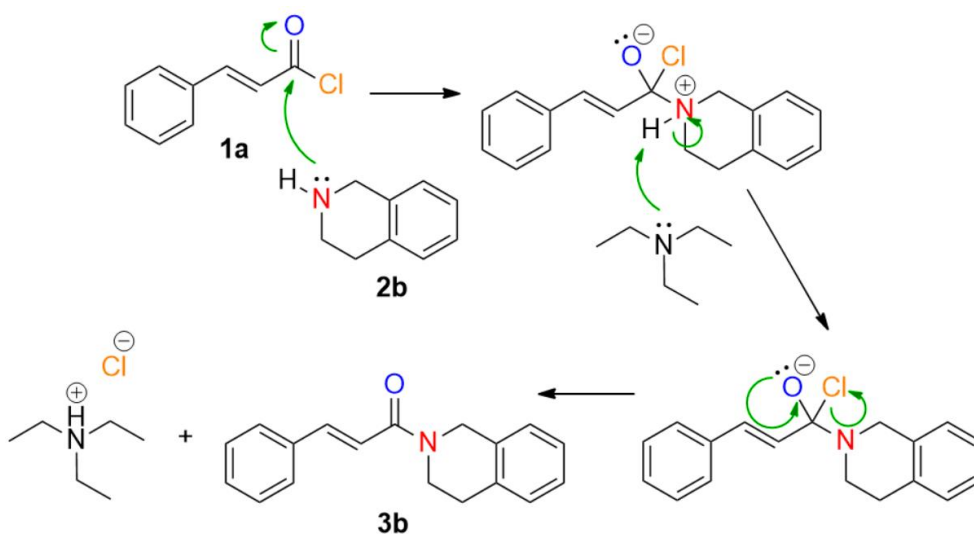


Figure 2. Mechanism for the synthesis of compound **3b**.

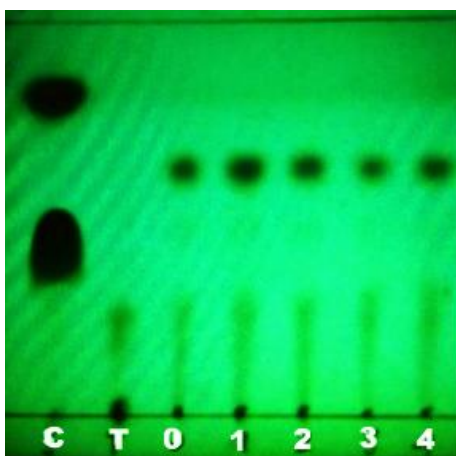


Figure 3. Reaction time optimization results using TLC under UV light 254 nm (C: cinnamoyl chloride; T: 1,2,3,4-tetrahydroisoquinoline; 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4: sampling hours 0, 1, 2, 3, 4).

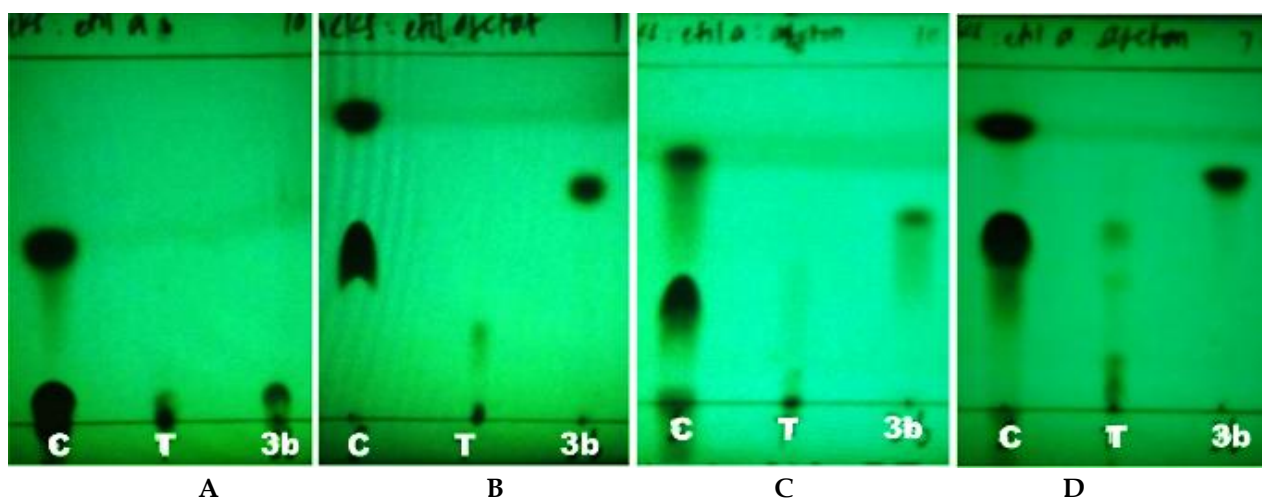


Figure 4. TLC spot from eluent optimization results (eluent A, B, C, and D); C: cinnamoyl chloride; T: 1,2,3,4-tetrahydroisoquinoline; **3b**: target compound.

### Organoleptic test

The synthesized product exhibited a crystalline form with a distinctive yellow color, as depicted in **Figure 5**.



**Figure 5.** The crystal of target compound **3b**.

### Product compound purity test: melting range test

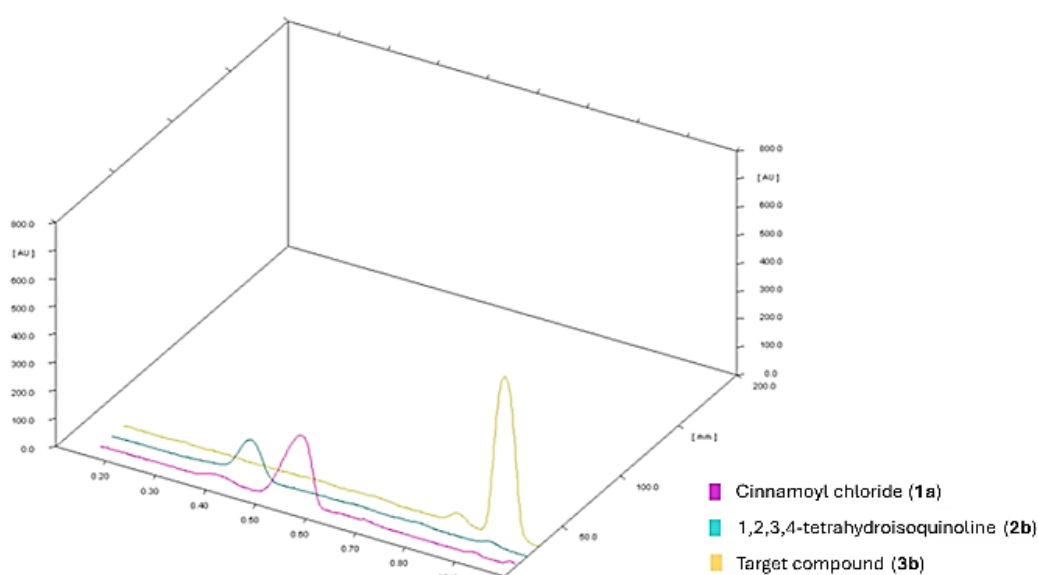
The purity of a compound can be assessed by its melting range, with a narrow range (typically 1-2°C) indicating high purity<sup>25</sup>. The target compound in this study exhibited a melting range of 72-74°C (**Table II**), confirming its purity.

**Table II.** Melting range test results of target compounds.

Replication	Melting range (°C)
1	72-74
2	72-73
3	72-74
<b>Average</b>	<b>72-74</b>

### Product compound purity test: TLC-densitometry

TLC-densitometry analysis revealed three distinct peaks corresponding to the cinnamoyl chloride (**1a**), the tetrahydroisoquinoline (**2b**), and the target compound **3b** (**Figure 6**). The R<sub>f</sub> values for these compounds were 0.57, 0.45, and 0.93, respectively. Notably, the chromatogram of the target compound lacked any peaks at the R<sub>f</sub> values of **1a** and **2b**, confirming the successful formation of the desired product.



**Figure 6.** Spectra of compounds **1a**, **2b**, and target compound **3b** at a wavelength of 289 nm.

**Target compound identification: FTIR**

The synthesized target compound exhibited a distinct functional group compared to the starting compound, an amide group. Amide groups are characterized by their C=O stretching vibration observed at 1680-1630 cm<sup>-1</sup> in FTIR spectra<sup>26</sup>. The FTIR spectrum of compound **3b** displayed an absorption peak at 1640.35 cm<sup>-1</sup>, confirming the successful formation of the target product (Figure 7 and Table III).

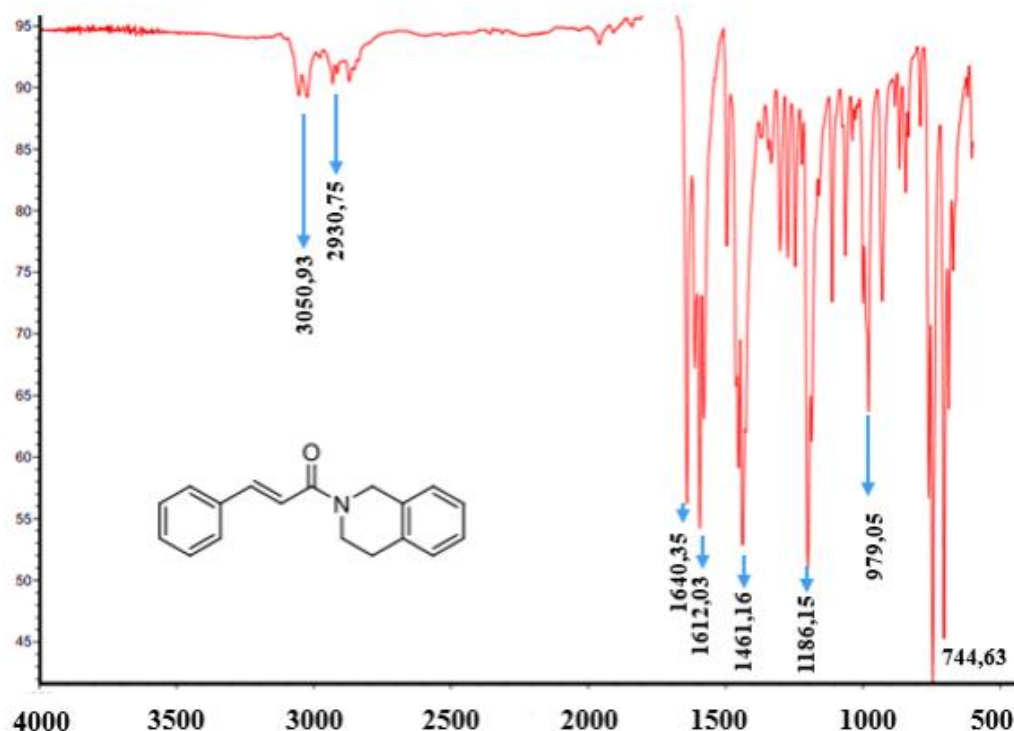


Figure 7. IR spectra of the target compound.

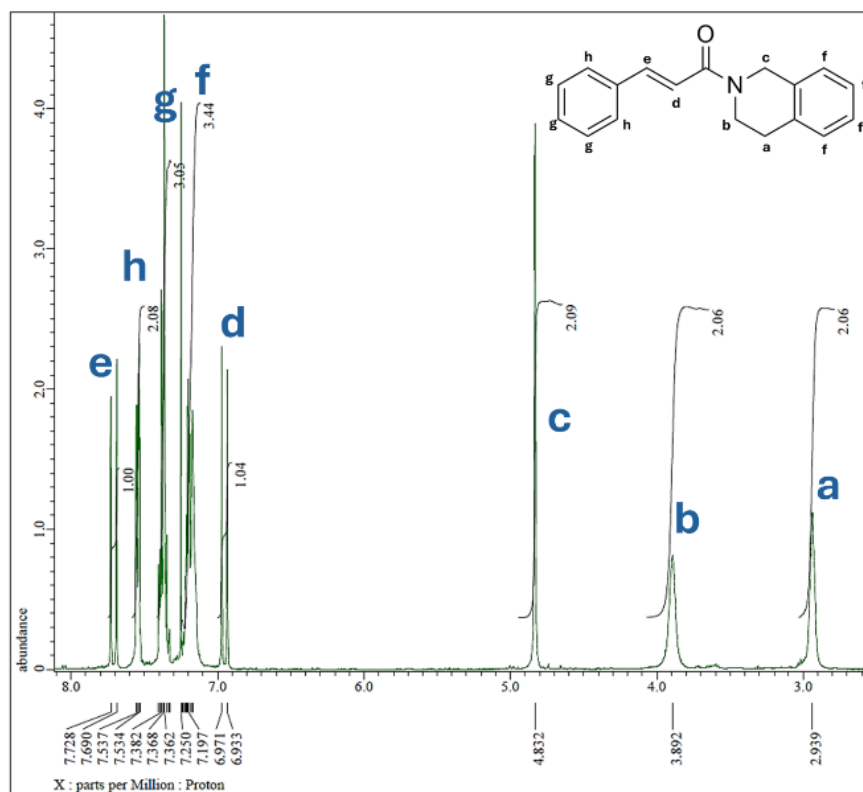
Table III. Interpretation of IR spectra of the target compound.

Functional group	Compound 3b Wavenumber (cm <sup>-1</sup> )	Theoretical Wavenumber (cm <sup>-1</sup> ) (9)
C-H aromatic	744.63	900-690
C-H alkene	979.05	1000-650
C-N	1186.15	1350-1000
C=C aromatic	1461.16	1600 and 1475
C=C	1612.03	1680-1600
C=O amide	1640.35	1680-1630
C-H	2930.75	3000-2850
C-H aromatic	3053.93	3150-3050

**Target compound identification: <sup>1</sup>H-NMR**

<sup>1</sup>H-NMR spectroscopy provides valuable information regarding the hydrogen atoms present in a molecule<sup>26</sup>. The spectrum of compound **3b**, depicted in Figure 8, exhibits eight distinct peaks. Peaks a, b, and c, located at chemical shifts of 2.939 ppm, 3.892 ppm, and 4.832 ppm, respectively, correspond to the -CH<sub>2</sub>- group within the piperidine ring. Peaks d and e, appearing at chemical shifts of 6.933 ppm and 7.690 ppm, are attributed to the =CH- group. Peaks f, g, and h, observed within the range of 7.197-7.537 ppm, represent hydrogen atoms from aromatic groups.

The integration ratio in <sup>1</sup>H-NMR analysis provides insight into the relative abundance of hydrogen atoms in a compound<sup>27</sup>. For compound **3b**, the integration ratio was determined to be 2 : 2 : 2 : 1 : 1 : 4 : 3 : 2 (Table IV). This ratio indicates a total of 17 hydrogen atoms, which aligns with the expected number of hydrogen atoms in compound **3b**. Therefore, the <sup>1</sup>H-NMR analysis confirms the identity of the isolated compound as compound **3b**.

Figure 8. <sup>1</sup>H-NMR result of compound 3b.Table IV. Interpretation of <sup>1</sup>H-NMR spectra of the target compound.

Proton	Type of proton	Chemical shift (ppm)	Integration	Multiplicity
A	-CH <sub>2</sub> -	2.94	2.06	Singlet
B	-CH <sub>2</sub> -	3.89	2.06	Singlet
C	-CH <sub>2</sub> -	4.83	2.09	Singlet
D	=CH-	6.93-6.97	1.04	Doublet
E	=CH-	7.69-7.73	1.00	Doublet
F	H aromatic	7.19-7.25	3.44	Multiplet
G	H aromatic	7.36-7.38	3.05	Multiplet
H	H aromatic	7.53-7.54	2.08	Multiplet

### Antioxidant test using DPPH method

The DPPH free radical scavenging assay was employed to evaluate the antioxidant activity of the compounds. This method is based on the principle that antioxidants can donate electrons to neutralize free radicals, leading to a decrease in absorbance at 516 nm<sup>28</sup>. The % inhibition of DPPH serves as an indicator of antioxidant activity. Three concentrations of cinnamic acid (100, 500, and 1000 ppm) and compound 3b were tested. The results, presented in Table V, demonstrate that compound 3b exhibited significantly higher antioxidant activity compared to cinnamic acid<sup>29</sup>, with % inhibition values of 10.61%, 24.24%, and 26.68% at 100, 500, and 1000 ppm, respectively, compared to cinnamic acid's 3.305%, 5.998%, and 6.936%. Statistical analysis using the T-test confirmed a significant difference in antioxidant activities between cinnamic acid and compound 3b. This suggests that the structural modification involving the addition of the isoquinoline group enhances the antioxidant properties of the compound.

Table V. Compound concentration and antioxidant activity (% inhibition).

Compounds	Concentration (ppm)	% Inhibition ± SD (n=3)
Cinnamic acid	100	3.305 ± 0.245
Cinnamic acid	500	5.998 ± 0.648
Cinnamic acid	1000	6.936 ± 0.187
3b	100	10.61 ± 0.308
3b	500	24.24 ± 1.205
3b	1000	26.68 ± 0.648

## CONCLUSION

This study successfully synthesized compound **3b** via a nucleophilic substitution reaction between compounds **1a** and **2b**, yielding an 81.56% yield. Subsequent evaluation of compound **3b**'s antioxidant activity at concentrations of 100, 500, and 1000 ppm revealed significant antioxidant potential, with % inhibition values of  $11\% \pm 0.308$ ,  $24\% \pm 1.205$ , and  $27\% \pm 0.648$ , respectively. Notably, compound **3b** exhibited superior antioxidant activity compared to cinnamic acid at all tested concentrations. These findings highlight the potential of compound **3b** as a promising antioxidant agent.

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## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

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**Writing - original draft:** Dian Agung Pangaribowo, Fathunnisa, Ari Satia Nugraha, Ayik Rosita Puspaningtyas, Indah Purnama Sary

**Writing - review & editing:** Dian Agung Pangaribowo

## DATA AVAILABILITY

None.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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