

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Characterization of Aminoglycoside-resistant *Enterobacteriaceae* Isolated from Inanimate Hospital Surfaces in Egypt

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ABSTRACT

Key words:

Aminoglycoside resistance;
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Background: The emergence of antibiotic resistance is one of the major issues facing global healthcare systems. **Objectives:** This study aims to determine the prevalence and resistance profiles of *Enterobacteriaceae* isolated from inanimate surfaces of an Egyptian hospital. **Methodology:** MALDI-TOF identified Gram-negative bacteria and the antibiotic resistance profile of *Enterobacteriaceae* isolates was determined by Vitek 2 system. **Results:** From the inanimate surfaces, 266 isolates of Gram-negative nosocomial bacteria were identified of which 175 (65.79%) belonged to *Enterobacteriaceae*. The most frequently isolated bacteria were *Klebsiella pneumoniae* (n=72), followed by *Escherichia coli* (n=65) while *Acinetobacter baumannii* (n=54) and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (n=21) were the dominant non-*Enterobacteriaceae* isolates. Moreover, the *Enterobacteriaceae* isolates exhibited high degrees of resistance against aminoglycosides, penicillins, and carbapenem. In addition, various aminoglycoside-resistance genes were detected by the polymerase chain reaction (PCR). Results revealed that most *Enterobacteriaceae* isolates harbours *aac(3)-Ib* gene (89.1%) followed by *aph(3')-Ia* (52.5%) and *aac(3)-II* (50.2%). **Conclusion:** Our findings demonstrate that inanimate surfaces may be potential reservoirs of resistant Gram-negative bacteria, which directly threaten hospitalized patients.

INTRODUCTION

The alarming rise in antibiotic-resistant bacteria continues to be a critical challenge for global healthcare systems. Within this context, the decreased susceptibility of *Enterobacteriaceae* to aminoglycosides, particularly amikacin, has emerged as a pressing concern.¹ Amikacin, a crucial aminoglycoside antibiotic, is often employed as a familiar treatment for severe infections caused by multi-drug resistant (MDR) Gram-negative bacteria.² However, the efficacy of amikacin is increasingly being compromised by emergence of resistant *Enterobacteriaceae* strains. This resistance is predominantly mediated by certain genes that encode aminoglycoside-modifying enzymes (AMEs) or induce target site modifications.³ Recent reports highlighted the alarming rise in amikacin resistance among *Enterobacteriaceae* isolates globally.⁴ The genetic underpinnings of this resistance are multifaceted, involving several mechanisms. A primary mechanism is mediated by AMEs, such as aminoglycoside acetyltransferases (AACs), which chemically modify amikacin, thereby preventing its interaction with the bacterial ribosome.⁵ Moreover, the acquisition of resistance genes facilitates their rapid dissemination across diverse bacterial species and environments.

Notably, the *aac(6')-Ib* gene, encoding an aminoglycoside acetyltransferase, and other AMEs genes were frequently identified in clinical isolates of *Enterobacteriaceae*.^{6,7}

The persistence and transmission of pathogenic bacteria in healthcare settings pose significant challenges to infection control and patient safety. Current research has demonstrated how inanimate hospital surfaces (IHS) influence the spread of *Enterobacteriaceae*, emphasizing the significance that environmental contamination plays in the epidemiology of hospital-acquired infections (HAIs).⁸ In healthcare environments, the IHS such as bed rails, door knobs, and other frequently touched surfaces can be potential reservoirs of various pathogens including *enterobacteriaceae*. These surfaces can harbor pathogenic bacteria for extended periods, facilitating their transfer to patients, healthcare workers, and visitors.^{9,10} The direct contact with contaminated surfaces by patients or healthcare workers can lead to transfer of bacteria to hands and subsequently to other surfaces or individuals. This paper aims to investigate the frequency of *Enterobacteriaceae* contamination on IHS and explore their antibiotic susceptibility patterns and aminoglycoside-resistance genes.

METHODOLOGY

Isolation and identification of bacteria

Samples were collected from exposed IHS at the surgical intensive care unit (Cairo University teaching hospital), from January 2021 to June 2022. Practically, 200 samples were collected from doorknobs, drawer handles, nurse call buttons, bedside tables, bed rails, sinks, and faucets using sterile cotton swabs. Subsequently, swabs were streaked on MacConkey agar plates (Condalab, Spain) and the plates were incubated at 35-37 °C. After 24-48 h, the developed colonies were picked and identified by matrix-assisted laser desorption-ionization time-of-flight (MALDI-TOF) mass spectrometry using a Microflex LT device and Biotyper software (Bruker Daltonics, Germany).¹¹

Antimicrobial susceptibility testing

All *Enterobacteriaceae* isolates were subjected to antimicrobial susceptibility testing using the VITEK 2[®] automated equipment (bioMérieux, France) with Vitek2[®] Gram Negative Susceptibility cards (AST-

GN67). The tested antibiotics were amikacin, ampicillin, ampicillin/sulbactam, cefazolin, cefepime, ceftazidime, ceftriaxone, ciprofloxacin, ertapenem, gentamicin, imipenem, levofloxacin, nitrofurantoin, piperacillin/tazobactam, tobramycin, and trimethoprim/sulfamethoxazole.

Detection of aminoglycoside-modifying genes

The presence of six aminoglycoside-resistance genes (*aac(3)-II*, *aac(6')-Ib*, *aac(6')-II*, *ant(3'')-I*, *aph(3')-Ia* and *aph(3')-VI*) was detected through polymerase chain reaction (PCR) with specific primers listed in Table 1, according to previously described method.^{12,13} Total DNA was extracted by the boiling lysis method.¹⁴ In brief, fresh bacterial colony was picked by a sterile toothpick, suspended in 100 µl of nuclease-free water and boiled in a thermal block for 10 min. Following centrifugation at 16,000 rpm for 5 min, the supernatant was used as DNA template. Amplicons were analyzed by electrophoresis in 1.5% agarose gel and DNA bands of expected sizes were gel-purified and sequenced.¹⁵

Table 1: Primer sequences for detection of aminoglycoside resistance genes

Target gene	Primer sequence (3' → 5')	Amplicon size (bp)
<i>aac(3)-II</i>	F: ATATCGCGATGCATACGCGG	877
	R: GACGGCCTCTAACC GGAAGG	
<i>aac(6')-Ib</i>	F: TTGCGATGCTCTATGAGTGGCTA	472
	R: CTCGAATGCCTGGCGTGTTT	
<i>aac(6')-II</i>	F: CGACCATTTTCATGTCC	542
	R: GAAGGCTTGTCGTGTTT	
<i>ant(3'')-I</i>	F: CACAACGCAGGTCATT	220
	R: CGCTAAGAATCCATAGTCCAA	
<i>aph(3')-Ia</i>	F: CGAGCATCAAATGAACTGC	623
	R: GCGTTGCCAATGATGTTACAG	
<i>aph(3')-VI</i>	F: ATGGAATTGCCCAATATTATT	780
	R: TCAATTCAATTCATCAAGTTT	

RESULTS

Prevalence of Bacteria

During this study, 200 swab samples were collected from various surfaces including doorknobs, drawer handles, nurse call buttons, bedside tables, bed rails, sinks, and faucets of the hospital. Of these swab samples, 192 (96.6%) were positive for growth on MacConkey agar, recovering presumptive Gram-negative bacteria. Overall, 266 bacterial colonies were recovered and subsequently identified. Of the 266 bacterial isolates, 175 (65.79%) belonged to *Enterobacteriaceae*, and the rest (n=91; 34.21%) were non-*Enterobacteriaceae* Gram-negative bacteria. MALDI-TOF/MS identification revealed 14 nosocomial

bacterial species belonging to 11 genera (Table 2). Of which, seven species belonged *Enterobacteriaceae* (*Escherichia coli*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Klebsiella oxytoca*, *Citrobacter freundii*, *Citrobacter koseri*, *Proteus mirabilis*, and *Raoultella ornithinolytica*). Oppositely, seven non-*Enterobacteriaceae* species (*Acinetobacter baumannii*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Acinetobacter haemolyticus*, *Burkholderia cenocepacia*, *Aeromonas hydrophila*, *Morganella morganii*, and *Providencia stuartii*) were identified. According to the findings, the most common isolates were *K. pneumoniae* (27.06%), *E. coli* (24.43%), and *A. baumannii* (20.30%).

Table 2: Prevalence of Enterobacteriaceae isolates

Isolates		n	%
Enterobacteriaceae	<i>Escherichia coli</i>	65	24.43
	<i>Klebsiella pneumoniae</i>	72	27.06
	<i>Klebsiella oxytoca</i>	23	8.64
	<i>Citrobacter freundii</i>	7	2.63
	<i>Citrobacter koseri</i>	4	1.50
	<i>Proteus mirabilis</i>	3	1.12
	<i>Raoultella ornithinolytica</i>	1	0.37
Non-Enterobacteriaceae	<i>Acinetobacter baumannii</i>	54	20.30
	<i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i>	21	7.89
	<i>Acinetobacter haemolyticus</i>	6	2.25
	<i>Burkholderia cenocepacia</i>	5	1.87
	<i>Aeromonas hydrophila</i>	3	1.12
	<i>Morganella morganii</i>	1	0.37
	<i>Providencia stuartii</i>	1	0.37
Total		266	100

Antibiogram Profile

The antibiogram profiles of all *Enterobacteriaceae* isolates against 16 antibiotics were investigated using Vitek 2 system and the antibiograms were tabulated (table 3). The *Enterobacteriaceae* isolates exhibited high resistance against most of the investigated antibiotics, especially, aminoglycosides, penicillins, and carbapenem. Regarding aminoglycosides, 171 (97.7%), 160 (91.4%), and 152 (86.8%) of the investigated isolates were resistant to gentamicin, tobramycin, and amikacin, respectively. In addition, all the investigated isolates were ampicillin-resistant (100%), and 83.4% of the isolates exhibited resistance to ampicillin/sulbactam. In addition, the isolates showed remarkable resistance to trimethoprim/sulfamethoxazole (92.5%), nitrofurantoin (80%), cefazolin (67.4%), and imipenem (48%), respectively. The low resistance rates were observed against piperacillin/tazobactam (15/175; 8.5%), ertapenem (16/175; 9.1%), and cefepime (17/175; 9.7%).

Table 3: Antibiotic-susceptibility patterns of Enterobacteriaceae isolates

Antimicrobial Categories	Antimicrobial Agents	Number of Isolates		
		S	I	R
Aminoglycosides	Amikacin (AN)	23/175	0/175	152/175
	Gentamicin (GM)	4/175	0/175	171/175
	Tobramycin (TM)	15/175	0/175	160/175
Penicillin	Ampicillin (AM)	0/175	0/175	175/175
Penicillin with β -lactamase inhibitor	Piperacillin/tazobactam (TZP)	160/175	0/175	15/175
	Ampicillin/sulbactam (SAM)	29/175	0/175	146/175
First-generation cephalosporin	Cefazolin (CZ)	57/175	0/175	118/175
Third-generation cephalosporin	Ceftazidime (CAZ)	88/175	0/175	87/175
	Ceftriaxone (CRO)	136/175	4/175	35/175
Fourth-generation cephalosporin	Cefepime (FEP)	158/175	0/175	17/175
Fluoroquinolones	Ciprofloxacin (CIP)	111/175	6/175	58/175
	Levofloxacin (LEV)	133/175	0/175	42/175
Carbapenem agents	Ertapenem (ETP)	159/175	0/175	16/175
	Imipenem (IPM)	91/175	0/175	84/175
Nitrofurantoin derivative	Nitrofurantoin (FT)	30/175	5/175	140/175
Diaminopyrimidine with sulfonamide	Trimethoprim/Sulfamethoxazole (SXT)	7/175	6/175	162/175

Prevalence of aminoglycosides-resistance genes

The most frequent resistance genes was *aac(3')-Ib* (156/175; 89.1%) followed by *aph(3')-Ia* (92/175; 52.5%) and *aac(3)-II* (88/175; 50.2%). Our results revealed that frequencies of *aph(3')-VI*, *ant(2'')-I* and *aac(6')-II* in the investigated isolates were 29.7% (n=52/175), 21.1% (n=37/175), and 13.7% (n=24/175), respectively (table 4).

Table 4: Distribution of aminoglycoside resistance genes among Enterobacteriaceae isolates

Gene	n	%
<i>aac(3)-II</i>	88/175	50.2
<i>aac(6')-Ib</i>	156/175	89.1
<i>aac(6')-II</i>	24/175	13.7
<i>ant(2'')-I</i>	37/175	21.1
<i>aph(3')-Ia</i>	92/175	52.5
<i>aph(3')-VI</i>	52/175	29.7

DISCUSSION

The contaminated IHS are known sources of infections, and the germs can spread epidemically throughout hospital divisions. In this regard, a number of research have demonstrated the significant role of the IHS in spreading various nosocomial pathogens.^{16,17} It has been suggested that patients may come into direct contact with polluted patient-care equipment, increasing their risk of contracting diseases, especially, with resistant types of bacteria that made it more difficult to provide medicines to treat bacterial infections.¹⁸⁻²⁰ This article addresses the implementation of MALDI-TOF/MS to identify the recovered bacteria from the IHS at Cairo University Hospital and highlights the resistance profiles of nosocomial *Enterobacteriaceae* isolates, with emphasis on their aminoglycoside-resistance genes. In this work, we found significant bacterial contamination on the IHS and equipment. Out of 200 environmental samples from swabs, 192 (96.6%) were positive for bacterial contamination. In a similar study, 223 bacterial isolated were retrieved from 137 IHS samples including bedrails, bedside table, washbasin, and hydro-alcoholic solution/soap dispensers at Edouard Herriot Hospital in France.²¹ These findings agree with several studies reporting that IHS can serve as reservoirs of nosocomial pathogens.^{22,23} We observed that 65.79% of the isolates belonged to *Enterobacteriaceae* and *Klebsiella* spp. were the most frequent bacteria (54.2%) followed by *E. coli* (24.43%). Noteworthy, *Acinetobacter* spp. were the most prevailing non-*Enterobacteriaceae* bacteria (34.2%) followed by *P. aeruginosa* (7.8%). These results are in harmony with previous studies reporting the high prevalence of *Klebsiella* spp., *E. coli*, *Acinetobacter* spp., and *P. aeruginosa* on the IHS as the most dominant nosocomial pathogens.²⁴⁻²⁷ Inadequate application of common precautions including hand hygiene and contact precautions and the transfer of the organisms through airflow, could be the main causes of higher levels of bacterial contamination.

This study shed light on the higher non-susceptibility percentages to various antibiotics including the three investigated aminoglycosides; gentamicin, tobramycin, and amikacin. Our results about resistance to gentamicin, tobramycin, and amikacin were consistent with previous studies.^{28,29} However amikacin, gentamycin, and tobramycin are among the first choices for treating Gram-negative infections, it has been reported that the rate of aminoglycoside-resistant *Enterobacteriaceae* has been rising globally due to the overuse of aminoglycosides.^{30,31} In the present study, the most prevalent aminoglycoside-resistance gene was *aac(6')-Ib*, followed by *aph(3')-Ia* and *aac(3)-II*. The most established aminoglycoside-resistance mechanisms are mediated by enzymes that are responsible for modifying

aminoglycosides such as O-adenyltransferases (ANT), N-acetyltransferases (AAC), and O-phosphotransferases (APH) and other AME-encoding genes including *aac(3)-II*, *aac(6')-I*, *ant(3'')-I*, *aph(3')-II*, and *ant(2'')-I*.³²⁻³⁹

CONCLUSION

This investigation demonstrated the contamination of various surfaces and equipment with antibiotic resistance bacteria that can persist on the IHS and may be spread to patients and workers. Our results highlight the importance of appropriate infection control strategies, with a focus on methods for surface disinfection and/or decontamination to prevent potential outbreaks resulting from spread of MDR bacteria.

Declarations:

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