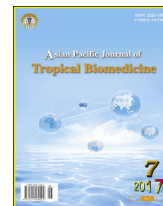




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Antibiotic susceptibility and molecular characterization of resistance genes among *Escherichia coli* and among *Salmonella* subsp. in chicken food chains



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ABSTRACT

Objective: To investigate the occurrence of resistance genes among *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) and *Salmonella* subsp. isolated in chicken food chains in Phnom Penh, 2012–2013.

Methods: Six hundred eighty two *E. coli* and 181 *Salmonella* Albany, Corvallis, and Kentucky strains were examined for susceptibilities to eight antimicrobials and following resistance genes were identified by PCR: *bla*_{Tem}, *StrA*, *aadA*, *sul1*, *sul2*, *gyrA*, *Tet (A)*, and *Tet (B)*.

Results: *E. coli* presented high resistances to tetracycline, amoxicillin, and sulfamethoxazole (63.1%–76.1%). *Salmonella* Albany and *Salmonella* Kentucky traduced high resistance percentages to amoxicillin, tetracycline, sulfamethoxazole, and nalidixic acid (84.6%–100%). Among amoxicillin-resistant isolates, *bla*_{Tem} genes were observed for 62% of *E. coli* isolates and 20% of 65 *Salmonella* Kentucky. The *StrA* gene was prevalent in 36% of 331 aminoglycoside-resistant *E. coli* and 90% of 40 aminoglycoside-resistant *Salmonella* Corvallis. The *sul2* gene was predominant among sulfamethoxazole-resistant isolates, for 56% of 431 *E. coli* and 53% of 66 *Salmonella* Corvallis; the *sul1* gene was observed in 54% of *Salmonella* Albany. The *Tet (A)* resistance gene was prevalent in *E. coli* (86%), *Salmonella* Corvallis (82%), *Salmonella* Kentucky (84%). High percentages of *gyrA* genes observed among nalidixic-acid resistant *E. coli* (91%), *Salmonella* Albany (92%), *Salmonella* Corvallis (75%) and *Salmonella* Kentucky (85%).

Conclusions: Important occurrences of resistance gene were observed among *E. coli* and *Salmonella* in chicken food chains in Cambodia.

1. Introduction

Escherichia coli (*E. coli*) is a Gram-negative bacterium and part of the commensal gut flora of humans, chickens and other livestock animals. It can, however, be pathogenic in all of these species. *E. coli* is of clinical importance due to its ability to initiate and establish various kinds of infections [1]. It is one of the most frequently isolated organisms from different clinical presentations of diarrhea in humans, including traveler's diarrhea [2]. Moreover, *E. coli* is one of the main causes of nosocomial infections in humans, pathogenic strains being

most commonly associated with urinary tract infections [3]. *Salmonella enterica* is also a Gram-negative bacterium. These typhoid and non-typhoidal *Salmonella* species are zoonotic agents, and are predominantly associated with foodborne infections in humans [4]. Salmonellosis in humans is generally contracted through the consumption of contaminated and poorly handled food, non-typhoid salmonellosis remains widespread, because of food contamination or asymptomatic carriage including foods of animal origin (mainly meat, chicken, and eggs) [5]. The clinical course of human non-typhoid salmonellosis is usually characterized by acute onset of fever, abdominal pain, diarrhea, nausea and sometimes vomiting. Although largely treatable, non-typhoid fevers may be severe in about 10%–15% of cases [6], and continue to be important causes of illness and death, particularly among children and adolescents in Southeast Asia [7].

In recent years, frequent misuse of antimicrobials contributed to increase high prevalence of resistance to the common

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antimicrobial used in humans among *E. coli* [8] and *Salmonella enterica* that have been isolated in hospitalized patients in Cambodia and in chicken meat products [9,10]. Antimicrobial agents are currently used for three main reasons: to treat infections in humans and animals, prophylactically in humans, and animals; and subtherapeutically in food animals as growth promoters. When persistent antibiotic use becomes the norm in both human and animal medicine, there is an increased pressure for developing and maintaining new resistance genes that can be shared among bacterial populations [11].

The study investigated the antibiotic susceptibility of *E. coli* isolated from chicken slaughter chains in Phnom Penh (PP) markets and most representative serovars of *Salmonella* isolated, *Salmonella* serovars Albany, Corvallis and Kentucky, from slaughter chains in PP markets and from farming chicken, to eight antimicrobials including, amoxicillin, amoxicillin/clavulanic acid, cephalothin, gentamicin, streptomycin, sulfamethoxazole, nalidixic acid, and tetracycline. The eight resistance genes *bla*_{T_{em}}, *StrA*, *aadA*, *sull*, *sul2*, *gyrA*, *Tet (A)*, and *Tet (B)* were characterized.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Samples design in chicken food chain

From February 2012 to October 2013, a total of 762 samples were collected comprising 80 chicken feces from two large chicken farms selected in neighboring areas of PP city, fecal samples were regularly selected from live chickens by the district veterinary services of PP, additionally with, 82 chicken caecae, 440 chicken neck skins, 80 rinse water and 80 chopping boards samples selected inside chicken slaughter chains and were collected from two PP live bird markets, Orussey and Dem Kor.

All chicken stalls in the two markets were listed, on Tuesday each week, the choice of stall and sample (*e.g.* caecae, neck skin, rinse water, and chopping board) was randomly selected using a random number table. At the markets, caecal swabs were collected from chickens and neck skin samples were taken from carcasses. At the point of sale, water samples used to wash chicken carcasses were collected into sterile bottles and chopping boards used to chop carcasses were also sampled by swabbing 100 cm² of the surface.

2.2. Microbiology examination

All samples were transported from the sites to the Institut Pasteur du Cambodge laboratory within an hour. Chicken feces, chicken meat, environmental samples were processed immediately upon arrivals. *E. coli* identifications in meat samples used Afnor validation method no Biorad-Rad 07/01-07/93 BRD 0717-12/04, and *Salmonella* subsp. was isolated and identified according to the standard NF EN ISO 6579, 2002 method.

2.3. *E. coli* and *Salmonella* organisms

A total of 682 market slaughter chains samples were positive with *E. coli*. Another total of 376 *Salmonella* isolates selected from 762 samples of above study 2012–2013, those three serovars [*Salmonella* Albany (*n* = 26), *Salmonella* Corvallis (*n* = 86) and *Salmonella* Kentucky (*n* = 69)] represented 48.1% and others 52 serovars represented 51.9% of *Salmonella* strains.

2.4. Susceptibility testing

All *E. coli* and *Salmonella* Albany, Corvallis, and Kentucky isolates were tested for their resistance to eight antimicrobials including, amoxicillin, amoxicillin/clavulanic acid, cephalothin, gentamicin, streptomycin, sulfamethoxazole, nalidixic acid, and tetracycline, following the recommendations of the National Committee for Clinical Laboratory Standards guidelines 2014. Strains were considered multiple drug resistant isolates (MDR) when these strains were resistant to at least three antibiotics. *E. coli* ATCC25922 was used as reference strain for the susceptibility test.

2.5. Identification of resistance genes

PCR was used to detect the presence of eight resistance genes; primers are described in Table 1 with published references. Most primers were designed to differentiate the specific gene sequences of interest; the only exceptions were the *bla*_{T_{em}} primers, which amplified the entire family of *bla*_{T_{em}} gene. As positive controls during PCR processes, reference fragments of resistance genes were obtained from the Danish National Food Institute (DTU, WHO collaborative center).

2.6. Sequencing and alignment of fragments

Using the same primers as in the PCR analysis, amplicons were sequenced to verify the identity of the gene products in all *E. coli* and *S. Albany*, *S. Corvallis*, *S. Kentucky* to evaluate *bla*_{T_{em}}, *StrA*, *aadA*, *sull*, *sul2*, *gyrA*, *Tet (A)*, and *Tet (B)* genes. The resulting nucleotide sequences were compared to nucleotides fragments obtained from the GenBank databases (NCBI). After sequencing PCR products of eight resistance genes (*bla*_{T_{em}}, *StrA*, *aadA*, *sull*, *sul2*, *gyrA*, *Tet (A)*, and *Tet (B)*) in *E. coli* and in *Salmonella* Albany, Corvallis, and Kentucky, alignments using Logiciels BioEdit and MEGA 6 revealed a homology from 90% to 95% of all PCR fragments with reference sequences.

3. Results

For 682 *E. coli* isolated from chicken slaughter chains in markets, 519 (76.1%) were resistant to tetracycline, 507 resistant to amoxicillin (74.3%) and 431 resistant to sulfamethoxazole (63.1%). In total 406 *E. coli* (59.5%) were MDR strains resistant to at least three different classes of antimicrobials in the panel of drugs tested (Table 2).

Table 2 describes also the phenotypic resistance patterns of *S. Albany*, *S. Corvallis*, and *S. Kentucky*. Among 26 *S. Albany* in the study, 25 were MDR (96.1%) with 25 isolates resistant to amoxicillin and nalidixic acid (both 96.1%), 22 isolates resistant to tetracycline (84.6%), and all *S. Albany* resistant to sulfamethoxazole (100%). Among *S. Corvallis* (*n* = 86), 41 isolates were MDR strains (47.6%) with 40 isolates resistant to streptomycin (46.5%), 66 resistant to sulfamethoxazole (76.7%), and 68 isolates resistant to tetracycline (79.0%). Sixty-seven MDR strains (97.1%) were observed among *Salmonella* Kentucky (*n* = 69), with 67 isolates resistant to tetracycline and nalidixic acid (both 97.1%), 65 isolates resistant to amoxicillin (94.2%), and 64 strains resistant to sulfamethoxazole (92.7%).

Table 3 shows the distribution of resistance genes among phenotypically-resistant *E. coli* isolated from markets. Among

Table 1List of oligonucleotides primers used for PCR of resistance genes for *E. coli* and *Salmonella* subspecies.

Drug class	Gene	Oligonucleotides primers	Fragment size (bp)	Annealing temp.(°C)	Ref
Beta-lactam	<i>Bla_{Tem}</i>	(F) ACCAATGCTTAATCAGTGAG (R) GCGGAACCCCTATTTG	963	50	[12]
Aminoglycoside	<i>StrA</i>	(F) CCAATCGCAGATAGAAGGC (R)CTTGGTGATAACGGCAATTC	548	58	[13]
	<i>aadA</i>	(F) GTGGATGGCGGCCCTGAAGCC (R) AATGCCAGTCGGCAGCG	528	58	[14]
Sulfamethoxazole	<i>Sul1</i>	(F) GTGACGGTGTTCGGCATTCT (R) TTTACAGGAAGGCCAACGGT	668	58	[15]
	<i>Sul2</i>	(F) GGCAGATGTGATCGACCTCG (R) ATGCCGGGATCAAGGACAAG	405	58	[15]
Nalidixic acid	<i>gyrA</i>	(F) ATGAGCGACCTTGCAGAGAAAATTACACCG (R) TTCCATCAGCCCTTCAATGCTGATGTCTTC	630	58	[16]
Tetracycline	<i>Tet(A)</i>	(F) GCTACATCCTGCTTGCCCTTC (R) CATAGATCGCCGTGAAGAGG	210	58	[12]
	<i>Tet(B)</i>	(F) TTGGTTAGGGGCAAGTTTTG (R) GTAATGGGCCAATAACACCG	659	5	[12]

Table 2Number of resistant *E. coli* and *Salmonella* Albany, Corvallis, and Kentucky belonging to chicken food chains [n (%)].

Antimicrobial agent	<i>E. coli</i>	<i>S. Albany</i>	<i>S. Corvallis</i>	<i>S. Kentucky</i>
Amoxicillin	507 (74.3)	25 (96.1)	2 (2.3)	65 (94.2)
Amoxicillin/clavulanic acid	15 (2.1)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.3)	0 (0.0)
Cephalothin	13 (1.9)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.3)	0 (0.0)
Gentamicin	17 (2.4)	0 (0.0)	3 (3.4)	0 (0.0)
Streptomycin	314 (46.0)	2 (7.6)	40 (46.5)	3 (4.3)
Sulfamethoxazole	431 (63.1)	26 (100)	66 (76.7)	64 (92.7)
Nalidixic acid	355 (52.1)	25 (96.1)	8 (9.3)	67 (97.1)
Tetracycline	519 (76.1)	22 (84.6)	68 (79.0)	67 (97.1)
MDR isolates	406 (59.5)	25 (96.1)	41 (47.6)	67 (97.1)

n: number of resistant isolates; MDR strains, resistant to at least three different classes of antimicrobials.

Table 3Occurrence of resistance genes among *E. coli*, and *Salmonella* serovars Albany, Corvallis, and Kentucky.

Antimicrobial agents	Genes tested	<i>E. coli</i>	<i>S. Albany</i>	<i>S. Corvallis</i>	<i>S. Kentucky</i>
Amoxicillin	<i>bla_{TEM}</i>	312 (62)	2 (8)	0	13 (20)
	<i>Unknown</i>	195 (38)	23 (92)	2 (100)	52 (80)
Aminoglycoside	<i>StrA</i>	120 (36)	0	36 (90)	1 (33)
	<i>aadA</i>	56 (17)	0	1 (2)	1 (33)
	<i>StrA + aadA</i>	128 (38)	0	0	0
	<i>Unknown</i>	29 (7)	2 (100)	3 (8)	1 (33)
Sulfamethoxazole	<i>Sul1</i>	14 (3)	14 (54)	0	25 (39)
	<i>Sul2</i>	241 (56)	1 (4)	35 (53)	2 (3)
	<i>Sul1 + Sul2</i>	28 (7)	0	0	1 (2)
	<i>Unknown</i>	148 (34)	11 (42)	31 (47)	36 (56)
Nalidixic acid	<i>GyrA</i>	322 (91)	23 (92)	6 (75)	57 (85)
	<i>Unknown</i>	33 (9)	2 (8)	2 (25)	10 (15)
Tetracyclines	<i>Tet(A)</i>	446 (86)	5 (22)	56 (82)	56 (84)
	<i>Tet(B)</i>	38 (7)	0	0	0
	<i>Tet(A) + Tet(B)</i>	8 (2)	0	0	0
	<i>Unknown</i>	28 (5)	17 (78)	12 (18)	11 (16)

Data are expressed as N, RG (%); N: Number of resistant isolates; RG: Number of positive isolates with resistant gene; (%): percentage of resistant isolates.

507 amoxicillin resistant *E. coli*, 312 (62%) gave positive amplicons for the *bla_{TEM}* gene. One hundred and twenty of 331 aminoglycoside-resistant *E. coli* carried the *StrA* gene (36%), 56 the *aadA* gene (17%) and 128 both the *StrA + aadA* gene (38%) (Table 3). Fourteen of 431 sulfamethoxazole-resistant isolates carried the *sul1* gene (3%), 241 the *sul2* gene

(56%), and 28 both the *sul1 + sul2* gene (7%). Three hundred twenty two of 355 *E. coli* resistant to nalidixic acid carried the *GyrA* gene (91%). Four hundred and forty six of 519 tetracycline-resistant isolates contained the *Tet (A)* gene (86%), 38 the *Tet (B)* gene (7%), and 8 the *Tet (A) + Tet (B)* gene (2%).

The distribution of resistance genes among phenotypic-resistant *Salmonella* serovars isolated from chicken food chains is showed in Table 3. Only two of 25 *S. Albany* were phenotypically-resistant to amoxicillin harbored the *bla_{Tem}* gene (8%). The genes responsible for the aminoglycoside resistance profile for two *S. Albany* were not detected. Fourteen of 26 sulfamethoxazole-resistant *S. Albany* isolates contained the *sul1* gene (54%) and one isolate the *sul2* gene (4%), five of 22 tetracycline-resistant *Salmonella Albany* contained the *Tet (A)* gene (22%), and 23 of 25 *Salmonella Albany* resistant to nalidixic acid carried the *GyrA* gene (92%).

Among *Salmonella Corvallis*, the genes responsible for two amoxicillin-resistant isolates were not detected. Thirty-six of 40 aminoglycoside-resistant *Salmonella Corvallis* yielded amplicons for the *StrA* gene (90%) and one isolate for the *aadA* gene (2%). Among 66 *Salmonella Corvallis* resistant to sulfamethoxazole, only 35 strains presented amplicons for the *sul2* gene (53%). Six of eight *Salmonella Corvallis* strains resistant to nalidixic acid yielded the *gyrA* gene (75%). Fifty-six out of 68 tetracycline-resistant *Salmonella Corvallis* carried the *Tet (A)* gene (82%).

In *Salmonella Kentucky*, 13 of 65 amoxicillin-resistant strains yielded the *bla_{Tem}* gene (20%), and one isolate of *Salmonella Kentucky* resistant to aminoglycoside presented one amplicon of the *StrA* gene (33%), and another isolate traduced one amplicon of the *aadA* gene (33%). Among 64 isolates resistant to sulfamethoxazole, 25 carried *sul1* (39%), two were positive for *sul2* (3%), and one isolate carried both the *sul1 + sul2* gene (2%). Fifty seven of 67 nalidixic-acid resistant isolates to nalidixic acid antibiotic carried the *gyrA* gene (85%). Fifty-six of 67 tetracycline-resistant *Salmonella Kentucky* isolates contained the *Tet (A)* gene (84%).

4. Discussion

Our study presents a moderate percentage of MDR strains among *E. coli* strains isolated from chicken food chains in Phnom Penh markets (59.5%) compared with *E. coli* MDR strains isolated (85.3%) from chicken farms, in Tien Giang province, South Vietnam, where the assessment was conducted during same period [8]. This high MDR prevalence in *E. coli* in Vietnam samples might due direct boot swab samples of household and small-scale chicken farms. Tetracycline resistant percentages among *E. coli* in our study were lower (76.1%) than tetracycline-resistant *E. coli* in Vietnam (93.4%).

For the resistance to tetracycline, *S. Albany* in this study yielded a higher resistance (84.6%) than that of *S. Albany* from chicken meat and lettuce in Bangkok and Central Thailand in 2015 (60%, $n = 5$) [17], and from clinical patients, meats, cattle, chicken and pigs in Vietnam in 2004 (66.6%, $n = 3$) [18]. Our study showed 100% of *S. Albany* was resistant to sulfamethoxazole, the same as observed in the Vietnam in 2004 and Thailand in 2001–2006 (100%, $n = 3$ vs 100%, $n = 3$) [18,19]. Resistances to tetracycline and sulfamethoxazole of *S. Corvallis* from our study (79.0% and 76.7%) were lower than among *S. Corvallis* isolated from humans and non-human sources in Bangkok [19], showing respectively 82% and 94% of resistance to tetracyclines and sulfamethoxazole. During the Bangkok and Central Thailand study in 2015, two *S. Kentucky* strains were isolated from chicken, and only one strain was observed resistant to nalidixic acid [17], while in our study we isolated 69 *S. Kentucky* with 67 MDR strains highly

resistant to tetracycline and nalidixic acid (both 97.1%), and 92.7%–94.2% to amoxicillin and sulfamethoxazole.

There was a high percentage of *E. coli* resistant to amoxicillin harboring *bla_{Tem}*, for 62% in our study, a moderate percentage of 35% in *E. coli* positive by the *bla_{Tem-1b}* presence isolated from canine urinary tracts were observed in Taiwan in 2015 [20] follows by two *S. Albany* with 8% positive isolates by the *bla_{Tem}*, and thirteen *S. Kentucky* amoxicillin-resistant (20%) contained 963 bp sequences similar to *bla_{Tem}* gene sequences.

Aminoglycoside nucleotidyl-transferases can confer resistance to gentamicin, tobramycin or streptomycin including *aad* and variant *StrA/B* among Gram-negative bacteria [21]. Thus, the *aadA*, *StrA*, and *aadA + StrA* genes have been found positive in *E. coli* of the study, and both *aadA* and *StrA* genes were also observed positive among *S. Corvallis* and *S. Kentucky*.

The frequency distribution of the *sul* genes in Vietnam, 2007, in the three environments investigated, swine farms, shrimp ponds, and a city canal generally followed *sul1 > sul2 > sul3* [22], it was collaborated with the occurrences of the *sul* gene in our study for *S. Albany* and *Kentucky*, but it was not true for *E. coli* and *S. Corvallis* resistant to sulfamethoxazole (Table 3).

Quinolone resistances, in *E. coli* and *Salmonella* are mainly associated with mutations in the quinolone resistance determining region of the *GyrA* and *parC* genes [21], more than 75% of *E. coli*, and *Salmonella* serovars resistant to nalidixic acid were found to harbor the *gyrA* gene in our study.

In the present study, the tetracycline resistance coding efflux gene in *E. coli* strains was mainly mediated by 86% *Tet (A)* gene, 7% *Tet (B)* gene and 2% *Tet (A) + Tet (B)* gene, and these combinations were as well observed in *Enterobacteriaceae* isolated from integrated fish farms of South China [23], but for *S. Albany*, *S. Corvallis*, and *S. Kentucky* in this study, it was mediated only by the *Tet (A)* gene.

In conclusion, chicken food chains in Cambodia were be reservoirs of highly diverse and abundant antibiotic resistance genes. These resistance genes pose potential health risks to the public and animal husbandry in the country.

Conflict of interest statement

We declare that we have no conflict of interest.

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