

Genotypic and phenotypic assessment of antibiotic resistance of MRSA bacteria isolated from food stuffs

Evaluación genotípica y fenotípica de la resistencia a los antibióticos de bacterias MRSA aisladas de alimentos

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Abstract

Background: Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) bacteria are one of the chief causes of food-borne diseases. This survey was done to assess the genotypic and phenotypic profiles of antibiotic resistance of MRSA isolates of foodstuffs.

Methods: Forty MRSA strains isolated from foodstuffs were selected. Isolates were approved using the biochemical tests and also cefoxithin and oxacillin susceptibility testing. MRSA isolates were phenotypically assessed by the disk diffusion. DNA was extracted from the MRSA isolates and subjected to PCR identification of antibiotic resistance genes.

Results: MRSA bacteria harbored the high prevalence of resistance toward penicillin (100%), tetracycline (95.00%), erythromycin (90.00%), and gentamicin (87.50%) antibiotics. *AacA-D* (55.00%), *ermA* (50.00%), and *tetK* (50.00%) had the highest distributions amongst examined antibiotic resistance genes.

Conclusion: Foodstuffs may be sources of resistant-MRSA, which pose a hygienic threat concerning their consumption. Nevertheless, further investigations are compulsory to understand additional epidemiological and molecular features of MRSA in foodstuffs.

Keywords: Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, phenotype, genotype, antibiotic resistance, foodstuffs.

Resumen

Antecedentes: La bacteria *Staphylococcus aureus* resistente a la meticilina (SARM) es una de las principales causas de enfermedades transmitidas por los alimentos. Este estudio se realizó para evaluar los perfiles genotípicos y fenotípicos de la resistencia a los antibióticos de los aislados de SARM de los alimentos.

Métodos: Se seleccionaron 40 cepas de SARM aisladas de productos alimenticios. Los aislados se aprobaron mediante pruebas bioquímicas y también de susceptibilidad a la cefoxitina y la oxacilina. Los aislados de SARM se evaluaron fenotípicamente mediante la difusión en disco. Se extrajo el ADN de los aislados de SARM y se sometió a la identificación por PCR de los genes de resistencia a los antibióticos.

Resultados: Las bacterias MRSA presentaron una alta prevalencia de resistencia a los antibióticos penicilina (100%), tetraciclina (95,00%), eritromicina (90,00%) y gentamicina (87,50%). *AacA-D* (55,00%), *ermA* (50,00%) y *tetK* (50,00%) tuvieron las distribuciones más altas entre los genes de resistencia a los antibióticos examinados.

Conclusión: Los productos alimenticios pueden ser fuentes de SARM resistentes, lo que supone una amenaza higiénica en relación con su consumo. No obstante, es necesario realizar más investigaciones para conocer otras características epidemiológicas y moleculares del SARM en los alimentos.

Palabras clave: *Staphylococcus aureus* resistente a la meticilina, fenotipo, genotipo, resistencia a los antibióticos, productos alimenticios.

Introduction

Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a Gram-positive and catalase-positive bacterium and common phenomena of the *S. aureus* bacteria resistant to penicillins and cephalosporins¹. The bacterium is responsible for severe cases of human clinical infections, including respiratory tract, urinary tract, blood, soft tissues, wound, burn and cerebrospinal infections with high distribution amongst hospitalized patients^{2, 3}. It is responsible for about 100,000 infectious cases and 20-30% mortality in the United States⁴. MRSA bacteria are also substantial causes of food-borne diseases known with several clinical signs, particularly short incubation period and weakness vomiting, nausea, abdominal cramps, and toxic shock syndrome^{5, 6}.

MRSA bacteria caused more complicated diseases for a more extended period compared to other bacteria. Most of their isolates harboured complete resistance toward diverse classes of antibiotic agents, particularly fluoroquinolones, aminoglycosides, tetracyclines, macrolides, cephalosporins, penicillins, and carbapenems⁷. Genetically, diverse antibiotic resistance genes are mainly responsible for the occurrence of antibiotic resistance in MRSA bacteria. *TetK*, *ermA*, *gyrA*, *dfiA*, *rpoB*, and *aacA-D* were considered as the most important antibiotic resistance genes in the MRSA isolates⁸.

Rendering the high MRSA importance as a food-borne pathogen, the present survey was performed to assess the genotypic and phenotypic patterns of resistance of MRSA bacteria isolated from numerous ready-to-eat food samples.

Materials and methods

MRSA isolates

The present research was performed according to the Canadian Guidelines of Research Ethics in Medical Sciences. Through the summer of 2020, 40 MRSA isolates of numerous food samples were selected for this survey. Isolates were identified using Gram staining, hemolytic activity on sheep blood agar (Merck, Germany), catalase test, coagulase test (rabbit plasma), oxidase test, OF glucose test, bacitracin sensitivity test (0.04 U), mannitol fermentation on Mannitol salt agar (Merck, Germany), urease activity, nitrate reduction, phosphatase, deoxyribonuclease (DNase, Merck, Germany) test, Voges-Proskauer (VP) (Merck, Germany) test and carbohydrate (xylose, sucrose, trehalose and maltose, fructose, lactose, mannose) fermentation tests⁹. MRSA identification was performed using ceftioxin and oxacillin susceptibility testing¹⁰.

Phenotypically survey of antibiotic resistance

Mueller-Hinton agar (Merck, Germany) and principles

of the Clinical Laboratory Standard Institute (CLSI) were applied for this purpose¹¹. Phenotypic resistance of MRSA bacteria was assessed toward gentamicin (10 µg/disk), ciprofloxacin (5 µg/disk), clindamycin (2 µg/disk), erythromycin (15 µg/disk), penicillin (10 µg/disk), and tetracycline (30 µg/disk) (Oxoid, UK)^{12, 13}.

Genotypically survey of antibiotic resistance

DNA was extracted from MRSA isolates of food samples using DNA extraction kit (Thermo Fisher Scientific, St. Leon-Rot, Germany)¹⁴⁻¹⁶. Quality and quantity of extracted DNA were then checked¹⁷⁻¹⁹. Antibiotic resistance genes were detected using the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) (Eppendorf Mastercycler 5330, Eppendorf-Nethel-Hinz GmbH, Hamburg, Germany). **Table I** shows the PCR circumstances for antibiotic resistance genes detection²⁰⁻²². Electrophoresis was done according to standard procedure^{23, 24}.

Results

All 40 MRSA isolates were assessed by the disk diffusion and PCR for phenotypically and genotypically assessment of antibiotic resistance, respectively. **Table II** shows the phenotypic resistance pattern of MRSA isolates. Disk diffusion showed that MRSA bacteria harbored the high prevalence of resistance toward penicillin (100%), tetracycline (95.00%), erythromycin (90.00%), and gentamicin (87.50%) antibiotics. The lowest resistance rate was obtained against ciprofloxacin (62.50%) and clindamycin (50.00%).

Table III shows the genotypic resistance pattern of MRSA isolates. *AacA-D* (55.00%), **ermA** (50.00%), and *tetK* (50.00%) had the highest distributions. However, *gyrA* (25.00%) and *rpoB* (30.00%) had the lowest distribution.

Table IV shows the simultaneous presence of antibiotic resistance encoding genes amongst the examined MRSA isolates. Majority of isolates harboured *aacA-D* + *ermA* (25.00%), *aacA-D* + *tetK* (25.00%), and *aacA-D* + *rpoB* (25.00%) antibiotic resistance encoding genes.

Discussion

MRSA is a nosocomial pathogen with both healthcare and community sources. It is also considered as a foodborne pathogen responsible for severe morbidity globally²⁵. Contaminated food stuffs, especially those with animal origin, are determined as one of the likely causes of MRSA transmission to human²⁶. Thus, MRSA in food stuffs has two paramount importance: food-borne diseases and transmission of antibiotic resistance.

The present survey was addressed the MRSA genotypic and phenotypic patterns of antibiotic resistance. MRSA

isolates of foodstuffs harboured the maximum resistance rate against penicillin (100%), tetracycline (95.00%), erythromycin (90.00%), and gentamicin (87.50%). Additionally, they harboured *aacA-D* (55.00%), *ermA* (50.00%), and *tetK* (50.00%) antibiotic resistance genes. Thus, phenotypic pattern of resistance was approved by the genotypic pattern. Irregular and indiscriminate antibiotic prescription are the main reasons for the high prevalence of resistance amid the MRSA isolates. Similarly, high MRSA resistance rate toward penicillin, tetracycline, erythromycin, and gentamicin was also reported previously. Safarpour Dehkordi et al. (2017)²⁷ reported that the *S. aureus* resistance rate toward penicillin, ceftaroline, gentamicin, amikacin, kanamycin, azithromycin, erythromycin, tetracycline, doxycycline, ciprofloxacin, levofloxacin, clindamycin, trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole, chloramphenicol and rifampin antibiotic agents were 100%, 10%, 81.08%, 70.27%, 43.24%, 59.45%, 86.48%, 100%, 81.08%, 48.64%, 43.24%, 48.64%, 83.78%, 29.72%, and 35.13%, respectively. They also showed that the distribution of *aacA-D*, *tetK*, *tetM*, *msrA*, *ermA*, *ermC*, and *linA* antibiotic resistance genes were 62.16%, 72.97%, 27.02%, 64.86%, 72.97%, 27.02%, and 43.24%, respectively. Findings of the present survey and those of Safarpour Dehkordi et al. (2017)²⁷ were similar to those of Fowoyo and Ogunbanwo (2017)²⁸ and Akanbi et al.

(2017)²⁹. High distribution of antibiotic resistance genes was also reported in surveys conducted in Algeria³⁰, China³¹, and Egypt³².

Rendering our results, only some of the MRSA bacteria, which harboured resistance to a particular group or a specific antibiotic carried the specific antibiotic resistance encoding gene to that particular antibiotic agent. This matter also found for other antibiotic agents and resistance genes. This finding is maybe because the presence of antibiotic resistance genes is only one of the known procedures for the occurrence of antibiotic resistance in bacteria³³⁻³⁵.

Conclusion

In conclusion, MRSA isolates of foodstuffs harboured high prevalence of resistance and distribution of antibiotic resistance genes. This finding may show the role of food stuffs in the transmission of MRSA bacteria to human populations. Using high-quality raw materials, proper hygienic circumstances in food processing, adequate cooking of food samples, cross-contamination prevention, and antibiotic prescription rendering the outcomes of disk diffusion can diminish the risk of MRSA.

Table 1: Primers and following conditions of the PCR²⁰.

Target gene	Primer sequence (5'-3')	PCR product (bp)	PCR programs	PCR volume (50µL)
<i>AacA-D</i>	F: TAATCCAAGAGCAATAAGGGC R: GCCACACTATCATAACCACTA	227	1 cycle: 94 °C ----- 5 min. 25 cycle: 94 °C ----- 60 s 55 °C ----- 70 s 72 °C ----- 60 s	5 µL PCR buffer 10X 1.5 mM MgCl ₂ 200 µM dNTP (Fermentas) 0.5 µM of each primers F & R 1.25 U Taq DNA polymerase (Fermentas) 2.5 µL DNA template
<i>ermA</i>	F: AAGCGGTAACCCCTCTGA R: TTCGCAATCCCTTCTCAAC	190	1 cycle: 72 °C ----- 10 min	
<i>tetK</i>	F: GTAGCGACAATAGGTAATAGT R: GTAGTGACAATAAACCTCCTA	360	1 cycle: 94 °C ----- 10 min. 25 cycle: 94 °C ----- 20 s 52 °C ----- 20 s 72 °C ----- 50 s 1 cycle: 72 °C ----- 5 min	
<i>gyrA</i>	F: AATGAACAAGGTATGACACC R: TACGCGCTTCTAGTATAACGC	223	1 cycle: 94 °C ----- 2 min. 30 cycle: 94 °C ----- 60 s 50 °C ----- 60 s 72 °C ----- 60 s 1 cycle: 72 °C ----- 5 min	5 µL PCR buffer 10X 2 mM MgCl ₂ 150 µM dNTP (Fermentas) 0.75 µM of each primers F & R 1.5 U Taq DNA polymerase (Fermentas) 3 µL DNA template
<i>dfpA</i>	F: CTCACGATAACAAGAGTCA R: CAATCATTGCTTCGTATAACG	201	1 cycle: 94 °C ----- 5 min. 32 cycle: 94 °C ----- 60 s 56 °C ----- 45 s 72 °C ----- 60 s 1 cycle: 72 °C ----- 10 min	5 µL PCR buffer 10X 2 mM MgCl ₂ 150 µM dNTP (Fermentas) 0.75 µM of each primers F & R 1.5 U Taq DNA polymerase (Fermentas) 3 µL DNA template
<i>rpoB</i>	F: ACCGTCGTTTACGTTCTGTA R: TCAGTGATAGCATGTGTATC	460	1 cycle: 94 °C ----- 5 min. 32 cycle: 94 °C ----- 60 s 56 °C ----- 45 s 72 °C ----- 60 s 1 cycle: 72 °C ----- 10 min	5 µL PCR buffer 10X 2 mM MgCl ₂ 150 µM dNTP (Fermentas) 0.75 µM of each primers F & R 1.5 U Taq DNA polymerase (Fermentas) 3 µL DNA template

Table II: Phenotypic resistance pattern of MRSA isolates.

N. MRSA Isolates	N (%) isolates resistant to each antibiotic					
	P10*	Gen	Ert	Tet	Cip	Clin
Food stuffs (40)	40 (100)	35 (87.50)	36 (90.00)	38 (95.00)	25 (62.50)	20 (50.00)

*P10: penicillin (10 µg/disk), Gen: gentamicin (10 µg/disk), Ert: erythromycin (15 µg/disk), Tet: tetracycline (30 µg/disk), Cip: ciprofloxacin (5 µg/disk), Clin: clindamycin (2 µg/disk).

Table III: Genotypic resistance pattern of MRSA isolates.

N. MRSA Isolates	N (%) isolates harbored each antibiotic resistance genes					
	<i>aacA-D</i>	<i>ermA</i>	<i>tetK</i>	<i>gyrA</i>	<i>dfrA</i>	<i>rpoB</i>
Food stuffs (40)	22 (55.00)	20 (50.00)	20 (50.00)	10 (25.00)	15 (37.50)	12 (30.00)

Table IV: Simultaneous presence of antibiotic resistance encoding genes amongst the examined MRSA isolates.

N. MRSA Isolates	N (%) isolates harbored each antibiotic resistance genes										
	<i>aacA-D</i> + <i>ermA</i>	<i>aacA-D</i> + <i>tetK</i>	<i>aacA-D</i> + <i>gyrA</i>	<i>aacA-D</i> + <i>dfrA1</i>	<i>aacA-D</i> + <i>rpoB</i>	<i>ermA</i> + <i>tetK</i>	<i>ermA</i> + <i>gyrA</i>	<i>ermA</i> + <i>dfrA1</i>	<i>ermA</i> + <i>rpoB</i>	<i>tetK</i> + <i>gyrA</i>	<i>tetK</i> + <i>dfrA1</i>
Food stuffs (40)	10 (25.00)	10 (25.00)	5 (12.50)	8 (20.00)	6 (15.00)	10 (25.00)	5 (12.50)	7 (17.50)	6 (15.00)	6 (15.00)	8 (20.00)

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