Introduction

Diarrhoea is one of the leading causes of children (≤ 5 years old of age) morbidity and mortality in developing countries (1) while the second leading cause of death globally (2). The diarrhoeagenic *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) virulent factors cause diarrhoea due to six major pathotypes (1). In Malaysia, acute diarrhoea is still a significant public health concern (3).
There is a scarcity of data on non-O157 *E. coli* serotype prevalence and virulence gene distribution, which is critical for the development of public health protection monitoring and control activities. The present study aimed to determine the prevalence of VTEC strains and to assess their virulence patterns as sources of infection among children ≤ 5 years old in Kuantan, Malaysia.

**Methods**

**Bacterial Isolates**

This study included 137 infants and young children (≤ 5 years old) infected by diarrhoea at Hospital Tengku Ampuan Afzan, Kuantan, Malaysia, from September 2018 to April 2019. This cross-sectional demographic information was obtained from patients, including age, sex, the onset of diarrhoea, antibiotic intake, relevant clinical and laboratory results. Children were enrolled if they had three or more liquid, semiliquid or bloody stools excretion per day. Most of the children with acute diarrhoea showed abdominal pain, followed by fever and vomiting. Our barring criteria were > 5 years old, no diarrhea, partial data, attributed to *Salmonella*, *Shigella*, or other types of bacteria and contaminated samples. Moreover, data collection was performed for comparison with these results.

**Microbiological Study**

In this prospective study, 137 stool specimens were collected in clear, transparent, wide-mouthed sterile bottles and immediately transported to the microbiology laboratory. Consistency, colour, and mucous, blood and parasites of the specimens were examined. All the stool specimens were plated on MacConkey agar (Oxoid, Basingstoke, United Kingdom) and incubated (Thermo Scientific, USA) aerobically 24 h at 37 °C. Suspected colonies were plated on brain-heart infusion (BHI) agar (Oxoid, UK) and performed standard biochemical (oxidase, urease, citrate, indole and hydrogen sulfide production) assay to confirms suspected colonies as *E. coli* according to El-Hadedy and Abu El-Nour (19). All the biochemically confirmed *E. coli* isolates were additionally screened on cefixime tellurite sorbitol MacConkey agar (CT-SMAC) (Merck, Germany). *E. coli* O157: H7 serotypes appeared colorless (non-sorbitol fermenters), while non-O157:
H7 seemed to be pink (sorbitol-fermenters) as described by previous researchers (20–23). Biochemically confirmed E. coli isolates were pre-enriched by BHI broth (Oxoid, UK) at a ratio of 1:10 and with 20% glycerol stored at –80 °C for further procedures.

**Serotyping Assays**

All the biochemically identified E. coli isolates (lactose positive and negative) were selected for serotyping. Determination of non-O157 E. coli serogroups was performed using the O157 latex agglutination test kit (Oxoid, Basingstoke, UK) and Remel™ slide agglutination test kit of polyvalent 2, 3 and 4 E. coli agglutinating sera (Thermo Scientific, USA) according to the manufacturer instructions. In the O157 latex agglutination test kit, isolates negative for agglutination were measured as non-O157 E. coli (24). For testing, a drop of polyvalent antisera was placed on a sterile slide. Each isolate was added to the antiserum. After 30 sec, samples were evaluated for agglutination. Moreover, agglutinated strains with polyvalent antisera were then tested with monovalent O antisera for the determination of non-O157 serotypes (O26, O121, O145, O103, O111 and O45).

**Determination of VT genes**

E. coli isolates were inoculated in BHI broth (Oxoid, UK) at 37 °C aerobically and subjected to detect the presence of VT genes (VT1 and VT2) using polymerase chain reaction (PCR) protocol of Cebula et al. (25–26). DNA templates were prepared by the boiling method (27). Three to five colonies of E. coli were mixed in 50 µL of deionised water. The suspension was boiled for 10 min at 95 °C and centrifuged (Eppendorf, USA) for 10 min at 10,000 rpm. The formation of concentrated supernatant containing DNA was assessed by NanoDrop spectrophotometer (Thermo Scientific, USA). This obtained DNA template was subjected to PCR (Eppendorf Mastercycler gradient, USA). Determination of targeting virulence properties genes was examined using PCR with the specific primers and conditions (Table 1) as described previously (25–26). All the commercially manufactured oligonucleotide primers were obtained from Apical Scientific Sdn Bhd, Malaysia. The amplified DNA templates were separated by 1.5% agarose gel electrophoresis stained with 0.5 μg/mL GelRed (Biotium, USA) and examined for DNA under ultraviolet light using gel documentation system (Amersham Imager 680, USA). All the PCR products were purified by QIAquick PCR purification kit (QIAGEN, USA) according to the manufacture's guidelines. After purification, the molecular weight of the DNA was determined and compared with the standard DNA molecular weight (1 kb DNA ladder) marker (QIAGEN, USA). This obtained purified DNA was sent for sequencing at Apical Scientific Sdn Bhd, Malaysia. Sequences were analysed using the BLAST programme for the nucleotide database (https://blast.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/Blast.cgi) and aligned with the sequence of the VT1 and VT2 gene.

**Table 1. Primers and PCR conditions**

| Target gene | Primer sequences | PCR condition | Size bp | Reference |
|-------------|------------------|---------------|---------|-----------|
| VT 1–F      | 5′-CAC CAG ACA ATG TAA CCG CTG-3′ | 94 °C for 3 min for one cycle followed by 35 cycles of 94 °C for 1 min, 65 °C for 2 min, 72 °C for 2 min and final extension 1 cycle of 72 °C for 10 min | 348 | (25–26, 28) |
| VT 1–R      | 5′-CAG TTA ATG TGG TGG CGA ACG-3′ | 72 °C | 584 |          |
| VT 2–F      | 5′-GCG TCA TCG TAT ACA CAG GAG C-3′ | 94 °C for 3 min for one cycle followed by 35 cycles of 94 °C for 1 min, 65 °C for 2 min, 72 °C for 2 min and final extension 1 cycle of 72 °C for 10 min | 72 |          |
| VT 2–R      | 5′-ATC CTA TTC CCG GGA GTT TAG C-3′ | 3′ | | |

**Antimicrobial Susceptibility Testing**

The standard method (disk diffusion method) was performed for the determination of antimicrobial drug susceptibility, referring to the Clinical and Laboratory Standard Institute (CLSI) (29). Ten different types of antibiotic discs were tested: i) tazobactam/piperacillin (TZP)-10 μg/75 μg; ii) ceftazidime (CAZ)-30 μg; iii) gentamicin (GM)-10 μg; iv) ampicillin (AMP)-10 μg; v) imipenem (IPM)-10 μg; vi) cefuroxime
Old (n = 11 [8%]). Also, infection with non-O157 E. coli strains was observed to increase with age. Among the non-O157 E. coli serogroups, O26 was most frequently isolated (8%), followed by O121 (6.5%) and least O45 (4.3%). However, most of the non-O157 E. coli isolates were detected in watery stools (n = 25 [18.2%]), mucoid stools (n = 16 [11.6%]) and bloody stools (n = 8 [5.8%]), respectively.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was obtained with Excel add-in Megastat, using the Pearson’s Chi-square test of independence and P-value (P ≤ 0.05) was considered significant.

Results

A total presumptive 137 E. coli isolates collected from children (≤ 5 years old) were examined for virulence genes association with diarrhoea. Forty-nine isolates (35.5%) appeared pink (sorbitol-fermenters) on CT-SMAC media (Merck, Germany) after the overnight incubation (Thermo Scientific, USA) at 37 °C (Figure 1). These isolates were selected for further confirmation and characterisation.

Table 2. Occurrence of target ‘big 6’ non-O157 serogroups from the clinical isolates of E. coli

| Age (old months) | No. of isolates | O111 | O121 | O145 | O26 | O45 | O103 | P-value |
|------------------|----------------|------|------|------|-----|-----|------|---------|
| 0–12             | 53             | 1\textsuperscript{a} | 1\textsuperscript{a} | 0    | 0   | 0   | 1\textsuperscript{b} |         |
| 13–24            | 22             | 1\textsuperscript{a} | 1\textsuperscript{a} | 1\textsuperscript{b} | 3\textsuperscript{a} | 1\textsuperscript{c} | 0       |         |
| 25–36            | 22             | 3\textsuperscript{a} | 3\textsuperscript{a} | 2\textsuperscript{b} | 2\textsuperscript{a} | 1\textsuperscript{c} | 1\textsuperscript{c} | < 0.001 |
| 37–48            | 25             | 2\textsuperscript{b} | 1\textsuperscript{b} | 2\textsuperscript{b} | 2\textsuperscript{b} | 3\textsuperscript{a} | 3\textsuperscript{b} |         |
| 49–60            | 15             | 1\textsuperscript{c} | 3\textsuperscript{a} | 3\textsuperscript{a} | 4\textsuperscript{a} | 1\textsuperscript{c} | 2\textsuperscript{a} |         |
| Total            | 137            | 8    | 9    | 8    | 11  | 6   | 7    |         |

Notes: \textsuperscript{a}Watery stools (n = 25 [18.2%]); \textsuperscript{b}Mucoid stools (n = 16 [11.6%]); \textsuperscript{c}Bloody stools (n = 8 [5.8%])

Figure 1. Formation of non-O157 E. coli on CT-SMAC culture plate media

Of the 137 diarrhoeic samples, 49 (35.5%) were E. coli non-O157 serogroups comprising O26 (n = 11 [8%]); O121 (n = 9 [6.5%]); O111 (n = 8 [5.8%]); O145 (n = 8 [5.8%]); O103 (n = 7 [5.1%]); and O45 (n = 6 [4.3%]) (Table 2). The presence of non-O157 E. coli isolates among children ≤ 5 years old were statistically significant (P < 0.001). Interestingly, children > 2 years old were highly infected with non-O157 (n = 38 [27.7%]) E. coli compared to ≤ 2 years old (n = 11 [8%]). Also, infection with non-O157 E. coli strains was observed to increase with age. Among the non-O157 E. coli serogroups, O26 was most frequently isolated (8%), followed by O121 (6.5%) and least O45 (4.3%). However, most of the non-O157 E. coli isolates were detected in watery stools (n = 25 [18.2%]), mucoid stools (n = 16 [11.6%]) and bloody stools (n = 8 [5.8%]), respectively.
Among the 137 children associated with diarrhoea, \( n = 17 \) (12.40%) children were 0 old months–5 old months of age followed by \( n = 36 \) (26.27%) children were 6 old months–12 months old, \( n = 22 \) (16.05%) were 13 old months–24 months old of age, \( n = 22 \) (16.05%) were 25 old months–36 months old of age, \( n = 25 \) (18.24%) were 37 old months–48 months old of age, and \( n = 15 \) (10.94%) were 49 old months–60 months old of age. The frequency of isolates among sex distribution was \( n = 71 \) (51.82%) male and \( n = 66 \) (48.18%) female, respectively. A total of 29 (21.16%) isolates were found to produce the verotoxin (VT1 and VT2) gene. A combination of VT1 and VT2 was found in 3 (2.18%) strains, while VT1 only was found in \( n = 21 \) (15.32%) isolates and VT2 only in \( n = 5 \) (3.64%) strains. Interestingly, the presence of the verotoxin gene has decreased with age. However, the most frequent, \( n = 8 \) (5.83%) VTEC isolates were detected in the age group of 13 old months–24 months old. There were significant differences in the frequency of the VTEC among the infants and children (males and females) aged \( \leq 5 \) years old with respect to various clinical symptoms. The occurrence frequency significantly related to the presence of multiple features/risk factors (clinical symptoms, temperature, feeding types, admission, diarrhoea type and duration). However, the frequency of the VTEC was most prominent in females’ patients (65.51%). This effect is the most significant subsequent infection of higher severity and persists in all age groups. Similarly, the hospitalised patients (admitted for 4 days–5 days) with a higher temperature (62.06%) along with other clinical symptoms of nausea and vomiting (34.48%) and watery stools (48.27%) are relatedly significant in the higher incidence of pathogenic VTEC. Surprisingly, infants and children on breast milk are less infected compared to those who are on breast milk plus formula milk (51.72%). Besides, all the features of infections were relatedly significant (\( P < 0.005 \)) risk factor for VTEC infections (Table 3).

### Table 3. Clinical features and risk factors among children infected with diarrhoeagenic *E. coli* pathotypes

| Features/risk factors | No. of isolates | Positive isolates | No. of diarrhoeagenic VTEC pathotypes | \( P \)-value |
|-----------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| Age (months old)      |                |                  | VT1 VT2 VT1 and VT2                   |              |
| 0–5                   | 17             | 7                | 6 0 1                                |              |
| 6–12                  | 36             | 5                | 3 0 2                                |              |
| 13–24                 | 22             | 8                | 6 2 0                                | 0.04         |
| 25–36                 | 22             | 5                | 4 1 0                                |              |
| 37–48                 | 25             | 2                | 1 1 0                                |              |
| 49–60                 | 15             | 2                | 1 1 0                                |              |
| Sex                   |                |                  |                                      |              |
| Male                  | 71             | 10               | 5 3 2                                | 0.03         |
| Female                | 66             | 19               | 16 2 1                               |              |
| Symptoms              |                |                  |                                      |              |
| Vomiting              | 25             | 10               | 7 2 1                                | 0.01         |
| Abdominal pain        | 32             | 7                | 4 2 1                                |              |
| Nausea                | 45             | 10               | 8 1 1                                |              |
| None                  | 35             | 2                | 8 0 0                                |              |
| Temperature           |                |                  |                                      |              |
| > 38 °C               | 56             | 18               | 13 3 2                                | 0.008        |
| < 38 °C               | 81             | 11               | 8 2 1                                |              |
| Feeding type          |                |                  |                                      |              |
| Breast milk           | 76             | 2                | 1 1 0                                |              |
| Breast milk + formula milk | 32       | 15               | 13 1 1                                | < 0.001      |
| Solid food            | 29             | 12               | 7 3 2                                |              |

(continued on next page)
sizes of 348 bp and 584 bp, respectively. For positive control *E. coli* O157: H7 was used at lane 1, which harbours both VT1 and VT2 gene while deionised water was used instead of template DNA as a negative control. PCR amplification specified that O26 and O45 were the leading serogroups carried verotoxin genes (18.36%; 9/49) and (10.20%; 5/49), respectively. A high proportion (P < 0.001) of the six serogroups non-O157 *E. coli* (O111, O121, O145, O26, O45 and O103) were significantly associated with variants genes (VT1, VT2 and, VT1 and VT2) (Table 4).

### Table 3. (continued)

| Features/risk factors                  | No. of isolates | Positive isolates | No. of diarrhoeagenic VTEC pathotypes | P-value |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|---------|
|                                       |                 |                   | VT1                                  |         |
|                                       |                 |                   | VT2                                  |         |
|                                       |                 |                   | VT1 and VT2                          |         |
| Diarrhoea type                        |                 |                   |                                       |         |
| Watery                                | 84              | 14                | 9                                    | 3       | 2       | 0.05 |
| Mucoid                                | 33              | 12                | 11                                   | 1       | 0       |       |
| Bloody                                | 13              | 3                 | 1                                    | 1       | 1       |       |
| Loose                                 | 7               | 0                 | 0                                    | 0       | 0       |       |
| Duration of diarrhoea                 |                 |                   |                                       |         |
| 1 day                                 | 22              | 7                 | 5                                    | 1       | 1       |       |
| 2–3 days                              | 50              | 5                 | 3                                    | 1       | 1       |       |
| 4–5 days                              | 50              | 15                | 11                                   | 3       | 1       | 0.04 |
| > 6 days                              | 7               | 0                 | 0                                    | 0       | 0       |       |
| No information                        | 8               | 2                 | 2                                    | 0       | 0       |       |
| Admission type                        |                 |                   |                                       |         |
| Admitted                              | 35              | 18                | 14                                   | 3       | 1       |       |
| Outpatients                           | 90              | 8                 | 5                                    | 1       | 2       | < 0.001|
| No information                        | 12              | 3                 | 2                                    | 1       | 0       |       |

All the 49 non-O157 *E. coli* were subjected to PCR using primers (VT1 and VT2). VT1 and VT2 gene were amplified, with amplicon sizes of 348 bp and 584 bp, respectively. For positive control *E. coli* O157: H7 was used at lane 1, which harbours both VT1 and VT2 gene while deionised water was used instead of template DNA as a negative control. PCR amplification specified that O26 and O45 were the leading serogroups carried verotoxin genes (18.36%; 9/49) and (10.20%; 5/49), respectively. A high proportion (P < 0.001) of the six serogroups non-O157 *E. coli* (O111, O121, O145, O26, O45 and O103) were significantly associated with variants genes (VT1, VT2 and, VT1 and VT2) (Table 4).

### Table 4. Distribution of verotoxin gene (VT1 and VT2) in non-O157 *E. coli* isolates

| Virulence genes | Six serogroups of non-O157 *E. coli* (n = 49) | P-value |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------|---------|
|                 | O111 O121 O145 O26 O45 O103                 |         |
| None            | 4 5 5 2 1 3                                 |         |
| VT1             | 3 3 3 6 4 2                                 | < 0.001|
| VT2             | 1 1 0 2 0 1                                 | < 0.001|
| VT1 and VT2     | 0 0 0 1 1 1                                 |         |
Original Article | Verotoxin producing non-O157 Escherichia coli

The antibiogram pattern of the 29 VTEC isolates indicates that antibiotic resistance is common among most of the VTEC isolates. The results demonstrated that 90% \((n=26)\) of the isolates were resistant to CTX, followed by 87% \((n=25)\) resistant to CXM and 80% \((n=23)\) to CAZ. In addition, 100% \((n=29)\) resistant to AMP. However, the results showed that less common resistance to CIP (52%) followed by GM (42%) and IPM (28%). Moreover, all the VTEC isolates were found to be the least resistant (20%) to MEM (Figure 3). Consequently, the antibiotic susceptibility patterns of the VTEC revealed that all the isolates were significantly resistant to at least three antibiotics belonging to different classes: AMC, CEX, CTX, ATM, TZP, CAZ, CIP, MEM, IMP and FEP. Of the total, 24 (80%) strains of the VTEC were multidrug-resistant (MDR) and statistically significant \((P < 0.001)\). The highest frequency of MDR isolates obtained from female patients \((n=16 [55%])\), while 8 (27%) in males (Table 5).

![Figure 2. Confirmation of VTEC](image)

![Figure 3. Antibiogram patterns of VTEC](image)
Malays J Med Sci. 2022;29(2):55–68

Table 5. MDR profile of VTEC isolates

| Resistance       | Types of antibiotics | Male (n = 10) | Female (n = 19) | Total (n = 29) | P-value |
|------------------|----------------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|---------|
| Resistance to 3 agents | IMP, TZP, CTX     | 4            | 9              | 13            | 13      |
| Resistance to 4 agents | ATM, MEM, CIP, CTX | 3            | 3              | 6             | 20      |
| Resistance to 5 agents | FEP, ATM, CEX, MEM, AMC | 1            | 2              | 3             | 10      |
| Resistance to 6 agents | CIP, CEX, AMC, CTX, ATM, IMP | -            | -              | 1             | 3       |
| Resistance to 10 agents | AMC, CEX, CTX, ATM, TZP, CAZ, CIP, MEM, IMP, FEP | -            | -              | 1             | 3       |

AMC-30 μg, CEX-30 μg, ATM-30 μg, CIP-10 μg, CTX-30 μg, FEP-30 μg, CAZ-30 μg, IMP-10 μg, MEM-5 μg and TZP-10 μg/75 μg.

Discussion

Diarrhoeagenic E. coli has become a health risk for children, particularly in developing countries (32). Various virulence factors such as verotoxin genes are attributed to non-O157 E. coli pathogenicity, causes illness, which ranges from mild watery diarrhoea to life-threatening complications (33). Non-O157 E. coli affects younger children more often compared to O157 E. coli (34). Also, VTEC has potential cytotoxic assays to cause severe illness that can lead to outbreaks, and these situations can transcend beyond the country’s boundary.

This present study showed that the VTEC have a relatively high potential for causing life-threatening complications such as diarrhoea and it is an agreement with several similar studies, specifically in Brazil (78.3%) (35), Canada (93.8%) (36), Iran (50%) and Malaysia (33%) (37), whereas low prevalence was reported in Iran (17.47%) (38). The pathogenic virulence properties of several VTEC serogroups, O26, O103, O111, O121, O145 and O45 serotypes were detected from 49 non-O157 E. coli isolates. However, these serogroups are commonly associated with severe disease outbreaks, and in some countries, are isolated from clinical samples more often than O157. In addition to the non-O157 serogroups, viz., O26, O145, O111 and O103 are more often associated with severe life-threatening complications (39). Our result showed that 8% of O26 serogroup was the most prevalent virulent factor. Similar results of O26 serogroup have been reported from Malaysia (25%), Asia-Pacific (7.2%) (40), Europe (3.5%) (41), Africa (7%) (42) and America (17%), (43) which are in agreement with our findings. However, a higher frequency of O26 serotype was observed in Iran (43.75%) (44), Malaysia (18.4%) (12) and Canada (62.6%) (45).

Epidemiological surveillance indicates that the persistence of non-O157 serotypes, E. coli O26 is the one of the major serotypes of concern. Moreover, the O121 serotype was the second most prevalent in our findings. Studies showed that O121 had been widely associated with severe disease outbreaks (46). Additionally, serotype O26 E. coli caused a recent outbreaks in the USA and Mexico (47), which draws our attention as O26 E. coli serotype are also the most prevalent in our current findings.

Many different incidences of VTEC strains associated with severe diarrhoea. Also, virulence gene (VT2) are associated with high prevalence of VTEC and with HC or HUS (48). In the current study, the most commonly observed VTEC virulence profile included 29 (59.1%) VT1, followed by 5 (17.2%) VT2 and 3 (10.3%) strains harbour both genes (VT1 and VT2) among 49 isolates of non-O157 diarrhoeagenic E. coli affected children (≤ 5 years old) (Table 2). However, a recent study shows that VT2 play a significant role as a source of human infections than VT1 (49–50). Molecular detection of VT1 virulence genes is more prominent than VT2 in VTEC strains. These findings (59.1%, VT1)
are reliable with a recent study performed by Shridhar et al. (51) and in contrast with Neher et al. (52) who stated that the VT2 gene was most frequent among VTEC isolates. However, VTEC isolates are associated with severe diarrhoea involving pathogenicity of VTEC virulent factors which agree with several previous studies (53–56). The high frequency of VT1 genes of VTEC strains attributes to E. coli infections (36). The wide variations in the prevalence of VTEC can be attributed to epidemiological determinants (57). These observations draw very significant attention viz., the prevalence of VTEC in this geographical area and these virulence genes belong to non-O157 E. coli. Hygienic practices, consumption of contaminated food, and consequent faecal-oral transmission make a substantial different scenario between developed and developing countries. Surprisingly, VTEC other than O157: H7 serotype is not actively reported in epidemiological settings, while non-O157 infections are increasingly recognised as significant causes of diseases, including outbreaks (5). VTEC, a substantial cause of dysentery, has also been reported in America, Europe, Asia and Africa (58–59).

Globally, microbial resistance properties among bacteria are at high risk and its susceptibility patterns depend on variation in population and environments (17, 60–61). In this present study, VTEC exhibited the highest level of resistance to AMP (100%), CTX 90%, CXM (87%) and CAZ (80%). Also, the resistance level (20% to 100%) against various classes of antibiotics was high in VTEC strains. The findings of the multidrug-resistant level (80%) were consistent with a recent study in Japan by Kusumoto et al. (62). However, 62% of the E. coli strains exhibited MDR in Malaysia (63). These highlights the rising trend of broad-spectrum MDR in VTEC strains. MDR strains of VTEC poses serious health hazards to human health by resisting various classes of antibiotics. Moreover, MDR interrupts or delays the treatment efficacy against it. Besides, the use of inappropriate drugs in animals and humans, and their release into the ecosystem affect antimicrobial resistance patterns. These resistant bacteria may transfer the resistance properties to other related bacterial species, which forms to multidrug-resistant strains (64). Finally, antibiotic becomes less effective, which led to infection persist in patients and increase the risk of spread worldwide.

Environmental contaminants, waste materials, non-developed sanitary and hygienic systems are a potential source of VTEC infectious pathogen prolongs illness, disability and death. However, there is no global policy statement on outbreaks control. Besides, a general overview of clinical documentation is absent on the most significant diarrhoeagenic E. coli, global VTEC outbreaks and diarrhoea episodes (5). The related available epidemiological information still needs to be investigated, and this will require an interactive initiative among infection control management, professionals at the clinic, public health and research level.

**Conclusion**

Virulence genes and pathogenic forms of E. coli cause a variety of diarrheal diseases in humans, especially among children. A high frequency of VTEC serotypes associated with pediatric diarrhoea in Kuantan, Malaysia. Besides, most of the isolates were resistant to different types of antibiotics, with a higher incidence of MDR. This study suggests that health priorities could prevent VTEC strains associate diarrhoea among children. Therefore, proper hygienic practices, consumption of well-cooked food, avoid raw milk or meat and drinking recreational water could be the best preventive pathways. Also, surveillance systems monitoring need to be extended to incorporate antibiotic use, development, and dissemination of antimicrobial-resistant within clinical and ecological samples.

**Acknowledgements**

We are grateful to Universiti Malaysia Pahang and Hospital Tengku Ampuan Afzan, Kuantan, Pahang, Malaysia, for providing the research facilities. We express sincere gratitude to the Medical Research and Ethics Committee (MREC), Ministry of Health, Malaysia.

**Conflict of Interest**

None.

**Funds**

This study was supported by the Universiti Malaysia Pahang through its Doctoral Research
Scheme (DRS) and PGRS180360 for study on association of plasmid in VTEC.

**Authors’ Contributions**

Conception and design: MFKK, SSR
Analysis and interpretation of the data: MFKK, SSR
Drafting of the article: MFKK, SSR, MNK, MNHM
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Final approval of the article: SSR, ANMR, MNK, MNHM
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Original Article | Verotoxin producing non-O157 Escherichia coli

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