Review Paper

POTENTIAL HEALTH IMPACT OF DRINKING WATER SOURCES: CASE STUDY FROM SERBIA

UDC 628.16.033(497.11)

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Abstract. Drinking water quality has a direct impact on the health of the population and is the main indicator of environmental sanitation and hygienic living conditions. The aim of this study was to investigate the quality of drinking water from three water supply systems in Serbia. The retrospective descriptive study was done covering the period between 2011 and 2015. We collected data from control water supply systems in three towns and tested the samples as required by the Regulation on the Hygienic Acceptability of Potable Water. The following indicators of water security were analyzed: ammonia, nitrates, nitrites, consumption of potassium permanganate, organic matter content, pH and electroconductivity. The microbiological quality was determined by analyzing the indicators of fecal contamination, Escherichia coli, Enterococci and Salmonellae, using the membrane filtration method.

The most frequent parameters of physical-chemical insecurity of water were a high concentration of ammonia, lower pH levels, and increased consumption of potassium permanganate. The most common detected microbes were aerobic mesophilic bacteria which are not significant from the aspect of human health. These results showed that drinking water could pose a potential risk to local consumers.

Key words: drinking water, quality, health aspect.

Received April 12, 2021 / Accepted April 21, 2021

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1. INTRODUCTION

Drinking water quality has a direct impact on the health of the population and is the main indicator of environmental sanitation and hygienic living conditions [1].

Water quality control is carried out according to the program in compliance with the Regulation on Hygienic Safety of Drinking Water [2]. Laboratory analyses of water samples are performed according to the Regulation on Sampling and Laboratory Methods for the Analysis of Drinking Water [3], implying physical-chemical and microbiological water quality. Drinking water quality control is performed in many water supply systems. Taking into consideration the specificity of preparation and drinking water treatment, as well as the results of a longitudinal examination of water quality, the reference systems chosen were public water supply systems in the city of Nis, the town of Krusevac and the town of Vranje. In the framework of a systematic analysis of drinking water quality, the sampling was carried out at defined locations.

The methodological approach to assessing the qualitative impact of drinking water on health using a descriptive risk indicator of drinking water quality and its corresponding percentage of incorrectness is shown in Table 1 [4].

| Level | Microbiological incorrectness, % | Description | Physical-chemical incorrectness, % | Description |
|-------|---------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| 1     | < 2                             | Insignificant | < 5                               | Acceptable  |
| 2     | 2.1 - 5                         | Small       | 5.1 - 10                           | Partially acceptable |
| 3     | 5.1 - 10                        | Moderate     | 10.1 - 20                          | Bad         |
| 4     | 10.1 - 25                       | Large       | 20.1 - 50                          | Very bad    |
| 5     | > 25                            | Huge        | > 50                               | Alarming    |

In terms of health, a special place can be given to the physical-chemical and microbiological properties of water that may have various negative implications. The presence of nitrogen compounds (ammonia, nitrates, nitrates) above the maximum permissible concentration (MPC) indicates potential microbial incorrectness, whereas the increased consumption of KMnO₄ indicates the presence of organic compounds in water that are of anthropogenic, vegetable or animal origin.

The most common health risk is unsafe drinking water caused directly or indirectly by the excretion of microorganisms found in human and animal feces. Typical waterborne diseases are caused by microorganisms from the gastrointestinal tract of humans and domestic animals when waste materials penetrate groundwater sources of drinking water. Fecal contamination of drinking water leads to dispersion of pathogenic bacteria, which can cause disease in the whole community that uses drinking water from the same water supply system. However, a potentially pathogenic organism shall not always cause symptomatic disease in all persons it comes in contact with. It depends on several factors: the concentration of pathogens in water, strain virulence, infective dose of a given pathogenic microorganism, susceptibility of individuals, and the incidence of infection in the community [5]. Therefore, the microbiological analysis of water is mainly based on the concept of fecal bacteria as indicators, while the presence of ammonia cannot be considered a reliable indicator for the preliminary screening of emergency outbreaks caused by fecal contamination [6].
The coliform group has been used extensively as an indicator of water quality and has historically led to the public health protection concept [7].

Based on recent legislation, the bacteria *E. coli* is the most suitable indicator of the possible presence of pathogenic microorganisms caused by fecal contamination [8]. Also, Ashbolt and colleagues found that the monitoring of the presence of *E. coli* in water, as the most specific indicator of fresh fecal contamination, directly indicates a risk to human health [9].

Recent research has found that, although they do not meet all the criteria for an ideal indicator, non-pathogenic strains of *E. coli* are considered as a potential indicator of fecal contamination of drinking water [10].

*Enterococcus* (fecal streptococcus) is another group of bacteria present in the feces of humans and animals. In comparison to *E. coli*, *Enterococcus* is not found in a great number in human feces, but it survives in water for a longer period of time, and therefore is considered a better indicator of the presence of fecal contamination of water [5]. *Enterococcus* is a genus with numerous species, but *E. faecalis* and *E. faecium* are dominant species that cause infections in humans and are important indicators of fecal contamination of drinking water [11].

The aim of the article is to present the results and health aspect of physical-chemical and microbiological quality of drinking water from the control water supply systems in Krusevac, Nis and Vranje in the 2011-2015 period, as well as health impact assessment of risk indicators of drinking water quality in terms of microbiological, physical-chemical incorrectness, in the above mentioned period.

2. METHODS

The analytical method in the form of a retrospective descriptive study, covering the period from 2011 to 2015 was applied. Statistical analysis and the presentation of the results were performed using the software packages Excel, SPSS 19.0 and XLSTAT2020 (Addinsoft, 2020). The following statistical methods were used for data analysis: descriptive statistics (arithmetic mean and standard deviation, frequency, percentage) to determine the extent of the basic variables in the research; correlation technique to determine the orientation and the correlation between the variables, analysis of variance (One-way ANOVA) with Post hoc LSD test included to determine the significance of differences between the mean concentrations of drinking water quality parameters in three towns, and principal component (PCA) and agglomerative hierarchical analyses (AHC) [12].

3. RESULTS

The analysis of physical-chemical parameters of drinking water (C_{NH4+}, C_{NO3-}, C_{NO2-}, C_{K MnO4}, pH and conductivity) in the reference water supply systems was executed based on the results of chemical analysis of characteristic parameters and maximum permissible concentrations which are indicators of drinking water quality, as well as using descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (One-way ANOVA) in the period between 2011 and 2015 are shown in Tables 2-6.
Table 2 Descriptive statistics and results of ANOVA tests in 2011

| The measured parameter | Water supply system | N  | AD  | SD  | Min | Max | F    | p    | MPC |
|------------------------|---------------------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|-----|
| NH₄⁺ (mg dm⁻³)         | Kruševac            | 106| 0.00| 0.00| 0.00| 0.00| 84.92| 0.000| 0.10|
|                        | Niš                 | 113| 0.00| 0.00| 0.00| 0.00|       |      |      |
|                        | Vranje              | 112| 0.09| 0.10| 0.00| 0.60|       |      |      |
| NO₃⁻ (mg dm⁻³)         | Kruševac            | 106| 3.2 | 0.97| 0.6 | 4.9 | 194.41| 0.000| 50  |
|                        | Niš                 | 113| 3.3 | 1.56| 1.4 | 7.2 |       |      |      |
|                        | Vranje              | 112| 0.8 | 0.38| 0.1 | 1.9 |       |      |      |
| KMnO₄ (mg dm⁻³)        | Kruševac            | 106| 8.28| 2.77| 2.22| 12.66| 60.88| 0.000| 8.5 |
|                        | Niš                 | 113| 5.23| 1.96| 2.07| 12.64|       |      |      |
|                        | Vranje              | 112| 7.77| 1.81| 3.79| 13.34|       |      |      |
| pH                     | Kruševac            | 106| 7.5 | 0.24| 6.8 | 8.1 | 62.32| 0.000| 6.8-8.5|
|                        | Niš                 | 113| 7.6 | 0.37| 6.6 | 8.3 |       |      |      |
|                        | Vranje              | 112| 7.1 | 0.38| 6.2 | 7.8 |       |      |      |
| Electrical conductivity| Kruševac            | 106| 329 | 29.46| 256 | 391 | 2088.56| 0.000| 1000|
|                        | Niš                 | 113| 426 | 46.83| 347 | 618 |       |      |      |
|                        | Vranje              | 112| 148 | 11.60| 126 | 185 |       |      |      |

N - the sample size; AS - mean; SD - standard deviation; Min - minimum value; Max - maximum value; F - a ratio of variances; MAC - maximum permissible concentration.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics and results of ANOVA tests in 2012

| The measured parameter | Water supply system | N  | AD  | SD  | Min | Max | F    | p    | MPC |
|------------------------|---------------------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|-----|
| NH₄⁺ (mg dm⁻³)         | Kruševac            | 113| 0.00| 0.00| 0.00| 0.00| 187.23| 0.000| 0.10|
|                        | Niš                 | 113| 0.00| 0.00| 0.00| 0.00|       |      |      |
|                        | Vranje              | 110| 0.07| 0.05| 0.00| 0.19|       |      |      |
| NO₃⁻ (mg dm⁻³)         | Kruševac            | 113| 4.04| 1.17| 1.80| 6.90| 298.88| 0.000| 50  |
|                        | Niš                 | 113| 3.70| 1.64| 0.40| 8.20|       |      |      |
|                        | Vranje              | 112| 0.53| 0.33| 0.10| 1.60|       |      |      |
| KMnO₄ (mg dm⁻³)        | Kruševac            | 113| 7.62| 1.13| 3.95| 12.87| 38.30| 0.000| 8.5 |
|                        | Niš                 | 113| 5.02| 1.48| 2.49| 10.06|       |      |      |
|                        | Vranje              | 110| 7.54| 4.00| 3.02| 31.16|       |      |      |
| pH                     | Kruševac            | 113| 7.2 | 0.33| 6.4 | 8.0 | 228.86| 0.000| 6.8-8.5|
|                        | Niš                 | 113| 7.7 | 0.27| 6.9 | 8.3 |       |      |      |
|                        | Vranje              | 110| 6.7 | 0.42| 5.7 | 7.6 |       |      |      |
| Electrical conductivity| Kruševac            | 113| 299 | 23.20| 222 | 376 | 1288.78| 0.000| 1000|
|                        | Niš                 | 113| 427 | 63.59| 289 | 586 |       |      |      |
|                        | Vranje              | 110| 154 | 15.63| 96  | 181 |       |      |      |

N - the sample size; AS - mean; SD - standard deviation; Min - minimum value; Max - maximum value; F - a ratio of variances; MAC - maximum permissible concentration.
### Table 4 Descriptive statistics and results of ANOVA tests in 2013

| The measured parameter | Water supply system | N | AD | SD | Min | Max | F     | p    | MPC |
|------------------------|---------------------|---|----|----|-----|-----|------|------|-----|
| **NH₄⁺ (mg dm⁻³)**     | Kruševac            | 116 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 111.18 | 0.000 | 0.10 |
|                        | Niš                 | 106 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 111.18 | 0.000 | 0.10 |
|                        | Vranje             | 116 | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 111.18 | 0.000 | 0.10 |
| **NO₃⁻ (mg dm⁻³)**     | Kruševac            | 116 | 3.9  | 1.1  | 1.8  | 6.1  | 104.18 | 0.000 | 50   |
|                        | Niš                 | 106 | 3.9  | 3.0  | 0.5  | 15.4 | 288.84 | 0.000 | 50   |
|                        | Vranje             | 116 | 0.9  | 0.4  | 0.3  | 1.8  | 288.84 | 0.000 | 50   |
| **KMnO₄ (mg dm⁻³)**    | Kruševac            | 116 | 8.23 | 1.60 | 5.45 | 13.27 | 288.84 | 0.000 | 8.5  |
|                        | Niš                 | 106 | 4.24 | 1.12 | 2.01 | 8.53 | 288.84 | 0.000 | 8.5  |
|                        | Vranje             | 116 | 7.18 | 1.00 | 5.17 | 9.22 | 288.84 | 0.000 | 8.5  |
| **pH**                 | Kruševac            | 116 | 7.4  | 0.40 | 6.3  | 7.9  | 166.11 | 0.000 | 6.8-8.5 |
|                        | Niš                 | 106 | 7.8  | 0.33 | 6.6  | 8.4  | 166.11 | 0.000 | 6.8-8.5 |
|                        | Vranje             | 116 | 6.9  | 0.29 | 6.3  | 7.9  | 166.11 | 0.000 | 6.8-8.5 |
| **Electrical conductivity (µS cm⁻¹)** | Kruševac             | 116 | 305  | 35.75 | 235  | 399  | 1357.99 | 0.000 | 1000 |
|                        | Niš                 | 106 | 419  | 54.00 | 301  | 572  | 1357.99 | 0.000 | 1000 |
|                        | Vranje             | 116 | 152  | 18.73 | 109  | 183  | 1357.99 | 0.000 | 1000 |

N - the sample size; AS - mean; SD - standard deviation; Min - minimum value; Max - maximum value; F - a ratio of variances; MAC - maximum permissible concentration.

### Table 5 Descriptive statistics and results of ANOVA tests in 2014

| The measured parameter | Water supply system | N | AD | SD | Min | Max | F     | p    | MPC |
|------------------------|---------------------|---|----|----|-----|-----|------|------|-----|
| **NH₄⁺ (mg dm⁻³)**     | Kruševac            | 117 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 100.56 | 0.000 | 0.10 |
|                        | Niš                 | 118 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 100.56 | 0.000 | 0.10 |
|                        | Vranje             | 117 | 0.07 | 0.08 | 0.00 | 0.31 | 100.56 | 0.000 | 0.10 |
| **NO₃⁻ (mg dm⁻³)**     | Kruševac            | 117 | 4.7  | 1.58 | 2.1  | 7.4  | 216.89 | 0.000 | 50   |
|                        | Niš                 | 118 | 3.1  | 1.66 | 0.6  | 12.7 | 216.89 | 0.000 | 50   |
|                        | Vranje             | 117 | 1.1  | 0.34 | 0.1  | 2.1  | 216.89 | 0.000 | 50   |
| **KMnO₄ (mg dm⁻³)**    | Kruševac            | 117 | 7.64 | 2.27 | 1.93 | 13.73 | 96.33  | 0.000 | 8.5  |
|                        | Niš                 | 118 | 4.60 | 1.69 | 2.21 | 11.77 | 96.33  | 0.000 | 8.5  |
|                        | Vranje             | 117 | 6.77 | 0.97 | 5.12 | 9.55 | 96.33  | 0.000 | 8.5  |
| **pH**                 | Kruševac            | 117 | 7.2  | 0.33 | 6.1  | 8.2  | 195.57 | 0.000 | 6.8-8.5 |
|                        | Niš                 | 118 | 7.8  | 0.31 | 7.1  | 8.5  | 195.57 | 0.000 | 6.8-8.5 |
|                        | Vranje             | 117 | 7.0  | 0.33 | 6.2  | 7.6  | 195.57 | 0.000 | 6.8-8.5 |
| **Electrical conductivity (µS cm⁻¹)** | Kruševac             | 117 | 309  | 43.17 | 215  | 398  | 1545.08 | 0.000 | 1000 |
|                        | Niš                 | 118 | 418  | 39.99 | 289  | 562  | 1545.08 | 0.000 | 1000 |
|                        | Vranje             | 117 | 165  | 14.00 | 124  | 192  | 1545.08 | 0.000 | 1000 |

N - the sample size; AS - mean; SD - standard deviation; Min - minimum value; Max - maximum value; F - a ratio of variances; MAC - maximum permissible concentration.
Based on the significance of ANOVA tests, it can be concluded that there were significant differences between the analyzed water supply systems in all tested parameters, except for the concentration of NO₂⁻, whose presence was not noticed.

Substantial deviation of maximum concentration of NH₄⁺ in drinking water was found in the water supply system in Vranje and it ranged from 0.19 to 0.60 mg dm⁻³ in summer. The presence of NH₄⁺ in the analyzed samples of drinking water was not noticed in reference systems in Nis and Krusevac.

The increased concentrations of maximum values of KMnO₄ consumption were discovered in all reference systems, and they ranged between 9.22 and 13.73 mg dm⁻³, with a significant deviation in the water supply system in Vranje, where the actual value was 31.16 mg dm⁻³. Minimum pH values of drinking water in Vranje and Krusevac ranged from 5.7 to 6.3, and from 6.1 to 6.4, respectively, which was significantly below the limit values pH of drinking water samples in the reference system in Nis was within the permitted range.

**Principal component analysis (PCA)**

In the first step of statistical evaluation, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (the significance level α was 0.05) was used to determine the distribution concentration against each investigated variable. This test revealed the original dataset was normally distributed for all samples, except the concentration of ammonium ions, where values equal to zero were removed from further analysis. Grubb’s test revealed no outliers.

Performed Principal Component Analysis (PCA) shows two Eigenvalues more than one (2.320 and 1.820) which should be according to Kaiser criterion be used for the examination of variances (Kaiser 1960) explaining 82.796% of the variability. The first component explained 46.4% of the variability and the second 36.396% of the variability.

To get a better insight into the latent structure of the data, the correlation matrix was rotated using Varimax orthogonal rotation with Kaiser optimization. The results after rotation are shown in Table 7.
Table 7 Factor loadings after Varimax rotation

|        | D1    | D2    | D3    | D4    |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| AS<sub>NH4</sub> | -0.164 | 0.394 | 0.904 | 0.004 |
| AS<sub>N03</sub>  | 0.936  | 0.140 | -0.321| -0.023|
| AS<sub>KMNO4</sub> | -0.787 | 0.191 | 0.585 | 0.052 |
| pH     | 0.901  | 0.399 | 0.162 | 0.048 |
| EC     | -0.218 | -0.913| -0.345| -0.006|

The first factor explained the largest proportion of variance (47.641%). Representatives of this factor were AS<sub>N03</sub>, pH, AS<sub>KMNO4</sub> with the highest loading values, and AS<sub>NH4</sub> and EC with relatively low loading values. Apart from AS<sub>NH4</sub>, AS<sub>KMNO4</sub> and EC, all investigated variables had positive loading values for this factor. The key variable of the second factor is EC, which is responsible for 24.079% of the total variance. In case of the third factor, which is responsible for 28.168% of the total variance, the key variable is AS<sub>NH4</sub>. In the first factor of the rotated PCA AS<sub>NH4</sub>, AS<sub>KMNO4</sub> and EC, and AS<sub>N03</sub> and pH were negatively correlated, which indicates that there is a strong correlation between AS<sub>N03</sub> and pH, and AS<sub>KMNO4</sub> (i.e., if AS<sub>N03</sub> and pH are higher, the values of AS<sub>KMNO4</sub> will be lower).

Agglomerative hierarchical clustering (AHC)

AHC of the standardized variables using the Ward method, as an amalgamation rule, and the squared Euclidean distance, as a measure of the proximity between the samples, was performed.

The dendrogram shows that all the samples could be grouped into two main clusters. Cluster I was formed by samples V1-V5 (V1-the sample from Vranje from 2011; V2-the sample from Vranje from 2012; V3-the sample from Vranje from 2013; V4-the sample from Vranje from 2014; V5-the sample from Vranje from 2015); cluster II was formed from two subclusters: 1) the first subcluster was formed from samples N1-N5 (N1-the sample from Nis from 2011; N2-the sample from Nis from 2012; N3-the sample from Nis from 2013; N4-the sample from Nis from 2014; N5-the sample from Nis from 2015); 2) the second subcluster consisted from samples K1-K5 (K1-the sample from Krusevac from 2011; K2-the sample from Krusevac from 2012; K3-the sample from Krusevac from 2013; K4-the sample from Krusevac from 2014; K5-the sample from Krusevac from 2015), figure 1.

Fig. 1: Dendrogram presenting the clustering of water samples
Health safety of drinking water

The health safety of drinking water in the reference water supply system in the examined period is shown in Table 8.

| Water supply system | The total number of samples | The total number of safe samples (microbiological, physical-chemical) | The total number of unsafe samples (microbiological, physical-chemical) |
|---------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Kruševac            | 570 (100 %)                | 312 (54.74 %)                                  | 258 (45.26 %)                                  |
| Niš                 | 570 (100 %)                | 529 (92.81 %)                                  | 41 (7.19 %)                                    |
| Vranje              | 570 (100 %)                | 305 (53.51 %)                                  | 265 (46.49 %)                                  |

The analyzed drinking water samples during the study period proved to be safe to human health (physical-chemical and microbiological safety) in 54.74% (312), 92.81% (529) and 53.51% (305) of controlled samples in water supply systems in Krusevac, Niš and Vranje, respectively. The causes of health unsafety were discovered in 45.26% (258), 7.19% (41) and 46.49% (265) of controlled drinking water samples in the reference systems in Krusevac, Niš and Vranje, respectively. In comparison to the existing legal basis, physical-chemical incorrectness was found in 43.33% (247) of samples in Krusevac, 6.32% (36) in Niš and 42.46% (242) in Vranje, whereas microbiological incorrectness was identified in 1.93% (11) of samples in Krusevac, 0.88% (5) in Niš and 4.03% (23) in Vranje. Physical-chemical analysis of drinking water samples in the reference water supply systems in the study period is shown in Table 9.

| Water supply system | The total number of physical-chemical samples | The total number of physical-chemical correct samples | The total number of physical-chemical incorrect samples |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Kruševac            | 570 (100 %)                                   | 323 (56.67 %)                                    | 247 (43.33 %)                                    |
| Niš                 | 570 (100 %)                                   | 534 (93.68 %)                                    | 36 (6.32 %)                                      |
| Vranje              | 570 (100 %)                                   | 328 (57.54 %)                                    | 242 (42.46 %)                                    |

Physical-chemical correctness of drinking water samples was identified in 56.67% (323), 93.68% (534) and 57.54% (328) of controlled samples in water supplies systems in Krusevac, Niš and Vranje, respectively. Microbiological analysis of drinking water samples in water supply systems in the study period is shown in Table 10.

| Water supply system | The total number of microbiological samples | The total number of microbiological correct samples | The total number of microbiological incorrect samples |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Kruševac            | 570 (100 %)                                 | 559 (98.07 %)                                    | 11 (1.93 %)                                      |
| Niš                 | 570 (100 %)                                 | 565 (99.12 %)                                    | 5 (0.88 %)                                       |
| Vranje              | 570 (100 %)                                 | 547 (95.96 %)                                    | 23 (4.03 %)                                      |
Microbiological correctness of drinking water samples was identified in 98.07 % (559), 99.12 % (565) and 95.96 % (547) of controlled samples in water supply systems in Krusevac, Nis and Vranje, respectively. The causes of physical-chemical incorrectness of water in the control water supply systems in the study period are shown in Table 11.

| Water supply system | The name of the indicator | The total number of incorrect samples |
|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                     | C\(_{\text{NH4}}^+\) (mg dm\(^{-3}\)) | C\(_{\text{KMnO4}}\) (mg dm\(^{-3}\)) | pH | Number of samples |
| Kruševac            | -                         | 221                                  | 38.77 | 34 | 5.96 | 247 | 43.33 |
| Niš                 | -                         | 29                                  | 5.09  | 7  | 1.23 | 36  | 6.32  |
| Vranje              | 87                        | 79                                  | 13.86 | 171| 30.00 | 242 | 42.46 |

* The same sample may be incorrect due to the presence of multiple indicators of incorrectness.

The results of the analysis of water quality parameters during the study period from 2011 to 2015 showed that the most frequent causes of physical-chemical incorrectness are high concentration of NH\(_{4}\)^+, KMnO\(_4\) consumption and low pH levels. In the water supply system in Krusevac, out of a total number of samples (247) or 43.33 %, even 221 samples or 38.77 % are contaminated due to KMnO\(_4\) consumption, while 34 samples or 5.96% are contaminated due to their pH. Out of a total number of contaminated samples (36) or 6.32 % in the water supply system in Nis, 29 samples or 5.09 % were harmful due to KMnO\(_4\) consumption and 7 or 1.23 % of samples due to their pH. In the water supply system in Vranje, out of a total number of samples (242) or 42.46 %, 87 samples or 15.26 % were risky due to concentration of NH\(_{4}\)^+, 79 or 13.86% due to KMnO\(_4\) consumption, and 171 samples or 30.00% due to pH. The causes of microbiological incorrectness of water in the reference water supply systems in the examined period are shown in Table 12.

| Water supply system | The total number of aerobic mesophilic bacteria in (per) 1 ml (37°C 48h) | The total coliform bacteria in (per) 100 ml (37°C 24-48h) | Fecal coliform bacteria (44°C 24-48h) | Number of samples | % | Number of samples | % | Number of samples | % | Number of samples | % |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------|---|----------------|---|----------------|---|----------------|---|
| Kruševac            | 9                                               | 1.58                                           | 2                               | 0.35           | 1  | 0.18          | 1  | 1.93           |    |
| Niš                 | 5                                               | 0.88                                          | 0                               | 0.00           | 0  | 0.00          | 0  | 5.88           |    |
| Vranje              | 16                                              | 2.81                                           | 7                               | 1.23           | 3  | 0.53          | 23 | 4.03           |    |

* The same sample may be incorrect due to the presence of multiple indicators of incorrectness.
Krusevac, 0.88% (5 samples) in Nis and 2.81% (16 samples) in Vranje, whereas total coliform bacteria per 100 ml (0.35% (2 samples) and 1.23% (7 samples) and fecal coliform bacteria, *Escherichia coli* and *Enterococcus faecalis* (0.18% (1 sample) and 0.53% (3 samples), were found in the water supply systems in Krusevac and Vranje, respectively. The causes of microbiological contamination in 1.93% (11) 0.88% (5) and 4.03% (23) of the samples of drinking water from water supply systems in Krusevac, Nis and Vranje, respectively, were an increased number of aerobic mesophilic and coliform microorganisms. The concentration of parameters of physical-chemical insecurity of water in all examined water supply systems is shown in Figures 2-6.

Fig. 2 The concentration of parameters of physical-chemical water insecurity in the examined water supply systems in 2011 (a - \(C_{\text{NH}_4^+}\), b - \(C_{\text{KMnO}_4}\), c - pH)

Fig. 3 The concentration of parameters of physical-chemical water insecurity in the examined water supply systems in 2012 (a - \(C_{\text{NH}_4^+}\), b - \(C_{\text{KMnO}_4}\), c - pH)

Fig. 4 The concentration of parameters of physical-chemical water insecurity in the examined water supply systems in 2013 (a - \(C_{\text{NH}_4^+}\), b - \(C_{\text{KMnO}_4}\), c - pH)

Fig. 5 The concentration of parameters of physical-chemical water insecurity in the examined water supply systems in 2014 (a - \(C_{\text{NH}_4^+}\), b - \(C_{\text{KMnO}_4}\), c - pH)
Potential Health Impact of Drinking Water Sources: Case Study From Serbia

Fig. 6 The concentration of parameters of physical-chemical water insecurity in the examined water supply systems in 2015 (a - C\textsubscript{NH}_4\textsuperscript{+}, b - C\textsubscript{KMnO}_4, c - pH)

Pearson correlation coefficient was used to assess the correlation between NH\textsubscript{4}\textsuperscript{+} concentration and the presence of bacteria in drinking water samples in the reference water supply systems. The correlation between NH\textsubscript{4}\textsuperscript{+} concentration and the presence of bacteria in drinking water samples in the control water supply systems is shown in Table 13.

### Table 13 The correlation between NH\textsubscript{4}\textsuperscript{+} concentration and the presence of bacteria in drinking water samples (2011 - 2015)

| Testing year | N  | R   | p'  |
|--------------|----|-----|-----|
| 2011         | 112| 0.042| 0.661|
| 2012         | 110| 0.178| 0.063|
| 2013         | 116| 0.151| 0.105|
| 2014         | 117| 0.079| 0.398|
| 2015         | 115|    |    |
| 2011 - 2015  | 570| 0.090| 0.032|

N - total number of samples; r - correlation coefficient; p - statistical significance.

Statistical significance at the 0.01 level

Pearson correlation coefficient discovered that there was no statistically significant correlation between NH\textsubscript{4}\textsuperscript{+} concentration and the presence of bacteria in drinking water samples, according to the year of study. However, there was a statistically significant correlation in the whole sample in the 2011-2015 period. The value of the correlation coefficient is 0.09, which suggests a low correlation between NH\textsubscript{4}\textsuperscript{+} concentration and the presence of bacteria in samples of drinking water, with a 0.01 level of statistical significance.

In the study period, there were statistically significant differences between the examined water supply systems in terms of the average concentrations of all examined parameters of drinking water quality. Individual differences in mean concentrations of the observed parameters of drinking water quality were examined by post hoc LSD tests and summarized in Table 14.

The highest average pH values were determined in Nis, whereas the lowest were found in Vranje. Based on the results of the LSD test, it was discovered that there was a statistically significant difference in pH values between the examined water supply systems in the 2011-2015 period.

Mutual comparison of average concentrations of NH\textsubscript{4}\textsuperscript{+} ions in the examined water supply systems showed that Vranje significantly differed from Nis and Krusevac, while there was no statistically significant difference between Nis and Krusevac in 2011-2015 period.
Table 14 The significance of LSD tests for mutual comparisons of average values of parameters between water supply systems

| Testing year | Water supply system       | Significance for NH₄⁺ | Significance for KMnO₄ | Significance for NO₃⁻ | Significance for pH | Significance for electrical conductivity |
|--------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 2011         | Kruševac-Niš              | 1.000                 | 0.000                  | 0.183                 | 0.005               | 0.000                                     |
|              | Niš-Vranje                | 0.000                 | 0.000                  | 0.000                 | 0.000               | 0.000                                     |
|              | Vranje-Kruševac           | 0.000                 | 0.090                  | 0.000                 | 0.000               | 0.000                                     |
| 2012         | Kruševac-Niš              | 1.000                 | 0.000                  | 0.033                 | 0.000               | 0.000                                     |
|              | Niš-Vranje                | 0.000                 | 0.000                  | 0.000                 | 0.000               | 0.000                                     |
|              | Vranje-Kruševac           | 0.000                 | 0.811                  | 0.000                 | 0.000               | 0.000                                     |
| 2013         | Kruševac-Niš              | 1.000                 | 0.000                  | 0.960                 | 0.000               | 0.000                                     |
|              | Niš-Vranje                | 0.000                 | 0.000                  | 0.000                 | 0.000               | 0.000                                     |
|              | Vranje-Kruševac           | 0.000                 | 0.000                  | 0.000                 | 0.000               | 0.000                                     |
| 2014         | Kruševac-Niš              | 1.000                 | 0.000                  | 0.000                 | 0.000               | 0.000                                     |
|              | Niš-Vranje                | 0.000                 | 0.000                  | 0.000                 | 0.000               | 0.000                                     |
|              | Vranje-Kruševac           | 0.000                 | 0.000                  | 0.000                 | 0.000               | 0.000                                     |
| 2015         | Kruševac-Niš              | 1.000                 | 0.000                  | 0.056                 | 0.000               | 0.000                                     |
|              | Niš-Vranje                | 0.000                 | 0.000                  | 0.000                 | 0.000               | 0.000                                     |
|              | Vranje-Kruševac           | 0.000                 | 0.000                  | 0.000                 | 0.000               | 0.000                                     |

The highest mean concentration of NO₃⁻ was discovered in Niš, and the lowest in Vranje in 2011, 2013 and 2015. There were no statistically significant differences between Niš and Krusevac, whereas the concentration of NO₃⁻ in Vranje significantly differed from its concentration in the other two cities. The highest mean concentration of NO₃⁻ was found in Krusevac, while the lowest was discovered in 2012 and 2014. The analysis of the results of the LSD test can prove that there is a significant difference between the reference water supply systems.

The statistical analysis showed that Niš significantly differed in terms of the average values of KMnO₄ consumption from Krusevac and Vranje, while there was no significant difference between Krusevac and Vranje in 2011 and 2012. Also, the results of the LSD test discovered that there was a significant difference between the examined systems in terms of KMnO₄ consumption in the 2011-2015 period.

In the analyzed period, from 2011 to 2015, the highest average value of electrical conductivity was noticed in Niš, and the lowest in Vranje. Based on the results of the LSD test, it was found that there was a significant difference between the examined water supply systems.

4. DISCUSSION

ANOVA tests showed that there were statistically significant differences in all examined parameters between the analyzed water supply systems, except for the concentration of NO₂⁻, which was not found in the samples.

The results of rotated Principal Component Analysis show that there is a strong correlation between AS₅₃₂₀ and pH, and AS₅₃₂₅ (i.e., if AS₅₃₂₀ and pH are higher, the values of AS₅₃₂₅ will be lower), which can be used in monitoring the quality of the water in the investigated cities (Vranje, Niš, Krusevac), reducing the number of variables to be
determined. On the other hand, the results of Agglomerative Hierarchical Clustering (AHC) show that water in each of these cities has distinguishing qualities, whereas water in Vranje shows particularly prominent features.

Health safety (physical-chemical and microbiological safety) was investigated in 54.74 % (312), 92.81 % (529) and 53.51 % (305) of controlled samples of water supply systems in Krusevac, Nis and Vranje, respectively.

Physical-chemical safety of drinking water samples was confirmed in 56.67 % (323), 93.68 % (534) and 57.54 % (328) of controlled samples in water supply systems in Krusevac, Nis and Vranje, respectively.

Microbiological safety of drinking water samples was identified in 98.07 % (559), 99.12 % (565) and 95.96 % (547) of controlled samples of water supplies systems in Krusevac, Nis and Vranje, respectively. *E. coli* or *enterococci of fecal origin* were found in only one sample (0.18%) in the water supply system in Krusevac and 3 samples (0.53 %) in Vranje in the 2011-2015 period.

The research carried out by Mitić-Stojanović and Cibulić in the water supply system in Vranje in 2001 discovered that concentration of NH\(_4^+\) was the cause of drinking water contamination in 88.83 %, out of 188 samples, which was considerably more in comparison to the results obtained in the 2011-2015 research (in 2011 - 25%, in 2012 - 5.45 %, in 2013 - 10.34 %, in 2014 - 18.80 % and 2015 - 16.52 %) [13]. The reason for a significantly lower percentage of contaminated samples due to concentration of NH\(_4^+\) was the introduction of a new water supply system from the reservoir since 2006.

Additional exposure to ammonia from water in the range from 0.014 to 0.14 mg kg\(^{-1}\) of body weight per day is negligible and does not represent a risk to human health, even to vulnerable groups [14].

In 2001, there was 31.38 % of contaminated water samples due to pH value, out of 188 samples tested, which was consistent with the results obtained in this study, where the average value of contaminated samples was 30.00%. Microbiological contamination was identified in 3.93% of 1679 samples tested in 2001, whereas the 2011-2015 research discovered 4.03% microbiologically contaminated samples out of 570 samples.

High concentrations of NH\(_4^+\) were found in 88% of samples in 2001, and it was significantly reduced in the 2011-2015 period, which was defined in this study, while microbiological contamination of water samples remained unchanged. On this basis, it can be concluded that the concentration of ammonia was not correlated with microbiological insecurity of drinking water, which is consistent with the results of this research. Also, a recent study has found that there were no statistically significant differences between the physical-chemical parameters and the total number of coliform group of bacteria, which is consistent with the results of this research [15].

The analysis of the qualitative impact of drinking water on human health was performed on the basis of risk indicators (physical-chemical and microbiological) of water quality and their corresponding percentage of incorrectness.

Based on the indicators of drinking water quality in terms of microbiological insecurity, the risk of negative effects of drinking water on human health was minor in the examined water systems in Krusevac and Vranje, while this risk was insignificant in the water supply system in Nis.

According to the indicators of drinking water quality in terms of physical-chemical insecurity, it was discovered that the risk of adverse effects of drinking water on human health was very high in the water systems in Krusevac and Vranje, while it is partially
acceptable in the water supply system in Nis; therefore, it is necessary to observe their quality constantly and systematically with suitable monitoring [4].

The quality of available water intended for water supply depends on natural factors, such as the geomorphological structure of the terrain, climate conditions, but also on human activity, since a lot of products of human activities get into the water.

The concentrations of NH$_4^+$ ions above the MPC and low pH levels in the water supply system in Vranje are closely linked with the inclusion of additional water sources in the form of wells spread along the river. The results obtained in the 2011-2015 period show that the water in that area was microbiologically correct in 95.96% of the samples, even though it contained high concentrations of ammonia in 15.26% of the samples, concerning the limits defined by the current Drinking Water Regulations. Relying only on the city's main water source, the presence of ammonia in concentrations above the MPC would be avoided and normal pH values would be obtained.

The increased KMnO$_4$ consumption and low pH levels in the water supply system in the town of Krusevac indicate the increased presence of organic matter in these waters in "the flourishing period of the lake". The cause of this occasional phenomenon is an inadequate process of raw water purification and an unregulated zone of a strict regime at the source as well as a possibility of insecurity of industrial and fecal wastewater in the limit zone.

In the research period, there were statistically significant differences between the examined water supply systems in terms of average concentrations of physical-chemical parameters of drinking water quality.

The microbiological analysis of drinking water showed no outbreaks of disease caused by fecal contamination of water during the study period.

5. CONCLUSION

In three selected municipalities of Serbia, drinking water does not show satisfactory quality in terms of the presence of the tested pollutants. Also, there were statistically significant differences between the examined water supply systems in terms of average concentrations of physical-chemical parameters of drinking water quality. Constant and systematic monitoring of investigated supply systems is further necessary. Also, reforms in the water industry and water security system are required, especially in selected regions.

Acknowledgement: This research was financially supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, contract no. 451-03-9/2021-14/200148.

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Potential Health Impact of Drinking Water Sources: Case Study From Serbia

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**POTENCIJALNI UTICAJ IZVORA VODE ZA PIĆE NA ZDRAVLJE LJUDI: STUDIJA SLUČAJA IZ SRBIJE**

Kvalitet vode za piće ima direktni uticaj na zdravlje stanovništva i glavni je pokazatelj ekološke i higijenske ispravnosti. Cilj ove studije bio je da istraži kvaritet vode za piće iz tri sistema vodosnabdevanja u Srbiji.

Retrospektivna deskriptivna studija urađena je za period između 2011. i 2015. godine. Prikupljeni su podaci iz kontrolnih sistema vodosnabdevanja u tri grada i testirani uzorci u skladu sa Uredbom o higijenskoj prihvatljivosti vode za piće. Analizirani su sledeći pokazatelj pokazatelji ispravnosti vode: amonijak, nitrati, nitriti, potrošnja kalijum-permanganata, sadržaj organske materije, pH i elektroprovodljivost. Mikrobiološki kvalitet utvrđen je analizom pokazatelja fekalne kontaminacije, Escherichia coli, Enterococci i Salmonellae, primenom metode membranske filtracije.

Najčešći parametri fizičko-hemijeske neispravnosti vode bili su visoka koncentracija amonijaka, nitići, potrošnja kalijum-permanganata, sadržaj organske materije, pH i elektroprovodljivost. Mikrobiološki kvalitet utvrđen je analizom pokazatelja fekalne kontaminacije, Escherichia coli, Enterococci i Salmonellae, primenom metode membranske filtracije.

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Ovi rezultati su pokazali da voda za piće, može predstavljati potencijalni rizik za lokalne potrošače.

Ključne reči: voda za piće, kvalitet, zdravstveni aspekt.