Correlation between *ESβL Salmonella* Serovars Isolated from Broilers and their Virulence Genes

M. Rady¹, ²*, N.A. Ezz-El-Din¹, K.F. Mohamed¹, S. Nasef², A. Samir¹, W.K. Elfeit³

¹Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Cairo University, Giza, Egypt

²Molecular Biology Unit, Reference Laboratory for Veterinary Quality Control on Poultry Production (NLQP), Animal Health Research Institute, Giza, Egypt.

³Avian and Rabbit Medicine Department, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Suez Canal University, Ismailia, Egypt

**ABSTRACT:** *Salmonella* is considered to be one of the major poultry bacterial pathogens. The poultry species are one of the main reservoirs for the human types, thus serving as public health hazards. The development of drug resistant genes and multidrug resistant types from *Salmonella* has increased recently. This current study was undertaken to estimate the correlation between extended spectrum beta-lactamase multidrug resistant (*ESβL*) *Salmonella* serovars isolated from broilers and their virulence genes. Two hundred and forty samples were collected from clinically diseased broilers chicks (showed disorders of the intestinal tract) and examined for the presence of *Salmonella* isolates according to ISO 6579: 2002 and ISO. 6579-3:2014 Fifty *Salmonella* isolates were isolated with an incidence of 20.8%. Isolates of *Salmonella* were serotyped as follows: 25 *S.* Kentucky, 9 *S.* Infectis, 6 *S.* Enteritis, 4 *S.* Heidelberg, and one isolates per serovars *S.* Labadie, *S.* Typhi, *S.* Agona, *S.* Pullorum, *S.* Newport and *S.* Virginia. AST (antimicrobial susceptibility testing) showed that high percentage of isolates were resistant to all Ampicillin (90%), Nalidixic acid (88%), Sulfamethoxazole + Trimethoprim (82%) and Tetracycline (82%). Approximately 86% of the isolates demonstrated multiple resistance, of which 18.75% and 25% were resistant to three and four antimicrobial types, respectively. Phenotypic detection of *ESβLs* by using screening test (*Cefinase®*) and confirmatory test by using combined disk diffusion test revealed that 32% of isolates were positive for both tests with 20% similarity and 12% diversity between the two tests. Molecular characterization of some *ESβLs* genes (*bla*TEM*, bla*CTX*, *bla*OXA*, *bla*CMY* and *bla*SHV) and some virulence genes (*inv*A, *avr*A, *sop*B, *bcf*C, *sti*n (was done using PCR. The results showed that all the *ESβLs* positive serovars were positive for amplification of all tested virulence genes and noticed that all the isolates were negative for *bla*CMY* gene. The present study suggests that virulent *ESβL Salmonella* serovars could infect broilers and should be taken into consideration as an important bacterial pathogen affecting poultry.

**Keywords:** *Salmonella*, virulence, ESBL, Broilers, genes

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**Corresponding Author:**
Mohamed Rady, Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Cairo University, Giza, Egypt
E-mail address: dr.m.rady26@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

The poultry industry is exposed to several threats such as of viral origin like avian Influenza, Newcastle disease, infectious bronchitis, infectious bursal disease, avian adenovirus, or of bacterial origin like the Salmonellae species, Escherichia coli, Clostridium spp. (Ayoub et al. 2019, Diab et al. 2019, Elhady et al. 2018, Fawzy et al. 2020, Sedeik et al. 2018, Sultan et al. 2019a, Sultan et al. 2019b, Sultan et al. 2020). Salmonella is one of the most serious bacterial pathogens as it is associated with economic losses in poultry farms in addition to the zoonotic effects. There are more than 2700 serotypes from Salmonella species according to the White Kauffmann classification; Salmonella species are responsible for a variety of acute and chronic diseases in poultry (Grimont . and Weill 2007). Avian species are responsible for a variety of acute and chronic diseases in poultry (Grimont . and Weill 2007). Avian Salmonellosis may occur as a result of infection with poultry-specific serovars, Salmonella Gallinarum and Salmonella Pullorum, causing systemic illness in birds as well as other Salmonella serotypes, including Salmonella Typhimurium and Salmonella Enteritidis and many others, which contribute to paratyphoid infections (Gast et al. 2003). Salmonellae are recognized by the specific host that belongs to pathogen recognition patterns (PRR) in birds and bony fish (Abouelmaatti et al. 2013, Elfeil et al. 2012, Elfeil et al. 2016). Since the 1990s, several reports highlighted that some Salmonella strains developed resistance to a range of antimicrobials agents and the range of developed resistance increased since then; whereas, this resistance developed due to improper use of antimicrobials agents in humans and animals’ husbandry, either using subtherapeutic doses, use using antimicrobial agents as growth promoters and incomplete antimicrobial courses...etc (Eid et al. 2019, Enany et al. 2018, M. Algamma et al. 2016). Multi drug resistant (MDR) bacteria (bacteria resistant to more than four different types of Antimicrobial agents’ families) increased dramatically during the last decade. They have a high impact in developing several disease conditions in humans and birds and are associated with elevated levels of morbidity and mortality caused by those pathogens in addition to high economic costs of therapy (cost of medication) and real risks of the spread of resistant strains which transmit acquired Multidrug resistant (MDR) genes to other bacteria among animals and humans (Chen et al. 2004, Eid et al. 2019, Elfeil et al. 2020, White et al. 2001). Thus, the MDR bacteria have a high impact on public health issues. The rapid development of resistance to extended-spectrum Cephalosporin in different serovars of Salmonella subspecies enterica has been observed worldwide and is predominantly linked to plasmid-mediated production of β-lactamases-producing bacteria (ESβL) (Authority 2009, EFSA 2018, EFSA. 2008). The widespread of ESβL-producing organisms and related treatment failures may be associated with failure in detection of the complex resistant phenotypes and may reflect to uncontrolled spreading of such pathogens (Sinha et al. 2008). The rapid spread of ESβL-producing bacteria in different poultry farms provoke a serious risk to livestock and humans, especially with cross spreading of the of ESβL-producing bacterial strains from poultry farms to livestock farms and humans which vice versa spread the MDR pathogens that cause wide-spread population infections (Brinas et al. 2003, Winokur et al. 2000). Some bacterial virulence genes are associated with main pathogenic behavior of the bacterial (as ability of bacteria to make adhesion to specific host cells as mucosal cell, ability for invasion cells and/ or ability to triggering fluids secretions which leads to diarrhea symptoms). Those genes are associated with the pathogenesis of Salmonella, as it reflects on its ability to survive and replicate inside host cells. This virulence trait is associated with the ability to develop systemic infections and a large number of genes are required to enable Salmonella to cope with nutritional limitations, to avoid clearance by the host defense mechanisms and immune system or overcome damage effect by antimicrobial peptides and radials on bacterial cell (Hegazy . and Hensel 2012).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

- All methods were carried out in accordance with Cairo University (Egypt) guidelines and regulations.
- All experimental protocols were approved by Cairo University (Egypt) Ethical committee.

Samples: Two-hander and forty samples were collected randomly from broilers clinically diseased chicks (showing disorders of the intestinal track.). These were 45 liver, 60 yolk sacs, 40 lung, 50 caecum and 45 spleen. The samples were then brought to the Microbiology department, faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Cairo University, in sterile wide-mouth screw capped bottles under cooling conditions and then analyzed for the presence of Salmonella.

Isolation of Salmonella: Under complete sterile condition broilers’ internal organs were examined for the presence of Salmonellae according to the ISO 6579: 2002/ Amd. 1: 2007 (Standardization 2007). The isolates were serotyped according to ISO 6579-3: 2014 in the Central Laboratory for Quality Control on Poultry Production.
(CLQP) in Dokki, Giza, Egypt (Standardization 2014).

The Antibiogram disk diffusion technique was adapted according to CLSI manual (NCCLS 2015).

**β-lactamase detection using Nitrocefin disks (Cefinase®):** According to the Manufacturer’s instruction, The Cefinase disc is impregnated with the chromogenic cephalosporin, Nitrocefin. Those disks exhibit quick color change from yellow to red due to hydrolysis of the amide bond in the beta-lactam ring by a beta-lactamase enzyme. When a bacterium produces certain amount of beta-lactamase enzyme the disc colour changed from yellow to red colour in the area where the isolate is smeared.

**β-lactamase detection using Combined Disc Diffusion Test (CDD):** The test inoculums (compared to 0.5 McFarland turbidity) were spread by sterile cotton swabs on Mueller-Hinton agar plates. The used discs were either Cefotaxime and Ceftazidime, separate and in combination with Clavulanic acid (ceftoxime 30 μg, ceftoxime/clavulanic acid 30/10 μg) and (Ceftazidime 30 μg, Ceftazidime/Clavulanic acid 30/10 μg). The plate was incubated at 35±2°C for 16-18 hours. The organisms were considered to be producing ESβL when A ≥ 5 mm increase in a zone diameter for either antimicrobial agent tested in combination with Clavulanic acid, versus the zone diameter of the agent when tested alone, equals ESβL.(NCCLS 2015).

**Molecular Detection of ESβLs Salmonella serovars and its virulence genes by PCR:** This was carried out by using primers for detection of ESβLs Salmonella serovars and some of its virulence genes as presented in tables (1/2).

**Table 1.** Primers Used for Molecular Detection of Esβl’s Salmonella Serovars and Its Virulence Genes by PCR

| Primer | Sequence | Amplified product | Reference |
|--------|----------|-------------------|-----------|
| Stn | F: TTG TGT CGT TAT CAC TGG CAA CC | 617 bp | Murugkar et al., (2003). |
| | R: ATT CGT AAC CCG CTC TCG TCC | | |
| invA | F: GTGAATATTGCACCGTCCGGCAA | 284 bp | Oliveira et al., (2003). |
| | R: TCATCGACCGTCAAAGGAACC | | |
| sopB | F: TCA GAA GRC GTC TAA CCA CTC | 517 bp | Huehn et al., (2010). |
| | R: TAC CGT CCT CAT GCA CAC TC | | |
| avrA | F: CCT GTA TTG TTG AGC GTC TGG | 422 bp | | |
| | R: AGA AGA GCT TCG TTG AAT GTC C | | |
| BcfC | F: ACC AGA GAC ATT GCC TTC C | 467 bp | | |
| | R: TTC TGC TCG CCG CTA TTC G | | |
| blaTEM | F: ATCAGCAATAAACAGC | 516 bp | Colom et al., (2003). |
| | R: CCCCGAAAGAAGTTTTC | | |
| blaSHV | F: AGGATTGACTGCTTGT | 392 bp | | |
| | R: ATTTGCTATTTGGCTTG | | |
| BlaOXA-1 | F: ATAATCTACTGTTGATCCTCC | 619 bp | | |
| | R: AACAACCCAACCATCC | | |
| CMY-2 | F: TGG CCA GAA CTG ACA GCC AAA | 462 bp | Pérez-Pérez and Hanson, (2002). |
| | R: TTT CTC CTG AAC GGT GGC | | |
| BlaCTX | F: ATG TGC AGY ACC AGT AAR GTK ATG GC | 593 bp | Archambault et al., (2006). |
| | R: TGG GTR AAR TAR GTS ACC AGA AYC AGC GG | | |

**Table 2.** Thermal cycle condition Used for Molecular Detection of Esβl’s Salmonella Serovars

| Gene | Primary denaturation | Secondary denaturation | Annealing | Extension | No. of cycles | Final extension |
|------|----------------------|------------------------|------------|-----------|--------------|----------------|
| Stn  | 94°C:10 min.         | 94°C:45 sec.           | 59°C:45 sec. | 72°C:45 sec. | 35 | 72°C:10 min. |
| invA | 94°C:5 min.          | 94°C:30 sec.           | 55°C:30 sec | 72°C:30 sec | 35 | 72°C:5 min. |
| SopB | 94°C:10 min.         | 94°C:30 sec.           | 58°C:30 sec | 72°C:30 sec | 35 | 72°C:10 min. |
| avrA | 94°C:10 min.         | 94°C:30 sec.           | 58°C:30 sec | 72°C:30 sec | 35 | 72°C:10 min. |
| bcfC | 94°C:10 min.         | 94°C:30 sec.           | 53°C:30 sec | 72°C:30 sec | 35 | 72°C:10 min. |
| blaTEM | 94°C:10 min.        | 94°C:45 sec.           | 54°C:45 sec | 72°C:45 sec | 35 | 72°C:10 min. |
| blaSHV | 94°C:10 min.        | 94°C:45 sec.           | 54°C:45 sec | 72°C:45 sec | 35 | 72°C:10 min. |
| BlaOXA-1 | 94°C:10 min.      | 94°C:45 sec.           | 54°C:45 sec | 72°C:45 sec | 35 | 72°C:10 min. |
| CMY-2 | 94°C:10 min.         | 94°C:45 sec.           | 55°C:45 sec | 72°C:45 sec | 35 | 72°C:10 min. |
| BlaCTX | 94°C:10 min.        | 94°C:45 sec.           | 60°C:45 sec | 72°C:45 sec | 35 | 72°C:10 min. |
RESULTS

Results of *Salmonella* isolation from 240 samples of clinically diseased chicks revealed that 50 *Salmonellae* were isolated with an incidence of 20.8% as shown in Table (3) with high recovery rate from liver 31% (14/240) followed with yolk sac 20% (12/240). Serotyping of the *Salmonella* isolates revealed that there were 25 *S.* Kentucky (10.4%), 9 *S.* Infantis (3.7%), 6 *S.* Enteritidis (2.5%), 4 *S.* Heidelberg (1.6%), and one isolate for the following serovars *S.* Labadi, *S.* Typhi, *S.* Agona, *S.* Pullorum, *S.* Newport and *S.* Virginia in percentage (0.4%) for each serovar. Results of antimicrobial susceptibility testing (AST) in table (4), showed that there were two pan susceptible *Salmonella* isolates (i.e. susceptible to all antimicrobial agents under test). There was one *Salmonella* isolate susceptible to one type of antimicrobial agents under test and three *Salmonella* isolates were susceptible to two types of antimicrobial agents under the test. A large percentage of isolates were resistant to all antimicrobials i.e. ampicillin (90%), Nalidixic acid (88%), Sulfamethoxazole-trimethoprim (82%) and tetracycline (82%). Out of 50 *Salmonella* serovars, 13 were ESβL when detected phenotypically by Cefinase with a rate of 26% while when combined with the disc diffusion test, again, 13 serovars were ESβL with a rate of 26%. The comparison between the screening and confirmatory methods revealed that 10 isolates had similar response and 6 isolates responded differently. Genotypic detection of ESβL-producing *Salmonellae* by using PCR revealed that 16 isolates which were tested for the presence of 5 genes that are responsible for ESβL production, CTX (Cefotaxime), TEM (Beta-lactamase), SHV (sulphhydryl variable active site), OXA (oxacillinase) and CMY (class C carbapenemase); as showed in Table (5-6) with a comparison between results of phenotypic and genotypic detection of ESβL-producing *Salmonellae*. The PCR amplification result in this study shows that a total of 10 isolates of phenotypic positive isolates were positive for blaTEM gene type using universal primers, 5 isolates were positive for blaCTX gene type, 2 isolates were positive for blaOXA-1 gene type and one isolate was positive for blaSHV gene type but no amplification was noticed that all the ESβLs positive serovars were positive for amplification of all tested virulence genes and also noticed that all the isolates were negative for blaCMY gene.

### Table 3. Result of *Salmonella* Isolation from different broilers chicks’ organs

| Organ     | No. of samples | No. of positive | percentage | Percentage to all |
|-----------|----------------|-----------------|------------|------------------|
| Liver     | 45             | 14              | 31%        | 5.8%             |
| Yolk Sac  | 60             | 12              | 20%        | 5%               |
| Lung      | 40             | 4               | 10%        | 1.6%             |
| Caecum    | 50             | 12              | 24%        | 5%               |
| Spleen    | 45             | 8               | 17.7%      | 3.3%             |

### Table 4. Collective resistance pattern of *Salmonella* serovars to the antibiotics used

| Antimicrobial agents                        | Resistance patterns |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Sulphamethoxole-Trimethoprim (SXT)         |                      |
| Amikacin 30 μg                             | R 82%   I 0%   S 9%   I 18% |
| Imepenem 10 μg                             | - 0%     I 3%    I 4%    I 96% |
| Tetracycline 30 μg                         | 41 82%   I 1%    I 8%    I 16% |
| Ampicillin 10 μg                           | 45 90%   I 1%    I 4%    I 8% |
| Nalidixic acid 30 μg                       | 44 88%   I 1%    I 5%    I 10% |
| Chloramphenicol 30 μg                      | 21 42%   I 2%    I 27%   I 54% |
| Gentamicin 10 μg                           | 1 2%     I 3%    I 46%   I 92% |
| Ciprofloxacin 5 μg                         | 29 58%   I 17%   I 4%    I 8% |
| Azetreonam 30 μg                           | 8 16%    I 3%    I 39%   I 78% |
| Ampicillin +Sulbactam                      | 12 24%   I 4%    I 34%   I 68% |
| Cefepem                                    | 8 16%    I 2%    I 40%   I 80% |
| Ceftriaxone 30 μg                          | 7 14%    I 5%    I 38%   I 76% |
| Cephalothin 30 μg                          | 16 32%   I 12%   I 22%   I 44% |
| Cefotaxime 30 μg                           | 4 8%     I 0%    I 46%   I 92% |
| Ceftazidem 30 μg                           | 4 8%     I 0%    I 46%   I 92% |
DISCUSSION
Salmonellosis in poultry is a worldwide spread infection, both for poultry as a disease causative agents and as a vehicle for human infection (Mohammed et al. 1999). Data from current study showed; Salmonella different serotypes incidence rate 20.8% with high recovery rate from liver 31% (14/240) followed with yolk sac 20% (12/240), the serotyping of recovered Salmonella isolates revealed that there were 25 S. Kentucky (10.4%), 9 S. Infantis (3.7%), 6 S. Enteritidis (2.5%), 4 S. Heidelberg (1.6%), and one isolates for the following serovars S. Labadi, S. Typhi, S. Agona, S. Pullorum, S. Newport and S. Virginia in percentage (0.4%) for each serovar. The emergence of antimicrobial agents’ resistance is a matter of concern. People infected by antimicrobial resistant Salmonella spp., particularly Nalidixic acid–resistant Salmonella spp., are more likely to die, are more likely to be hospitalized, and are hospitalized for longer periods than patients with infections caused by susceptible to antimicrobials strains of Salmonella spp. (Helms et al. 2004, Helms et al. 2002, Lee et al. 1994). Antimicrobial susceptibility tests described in this study; show a high percentage of isolates that were resistant to ampicillin (90%), Nalidixic acid (88%), Sulfamethoxazole-trimethoprim (82%) and tetracycline (82%) and out of 50 Salmonella serovars, 13 were found to be ESBL when detected phenotypically by Cefinase with a rate of 26% while when use combined disc diffusion test 13 serovars were ESBL with a rate of 26%. The comparison between the screening and confirmatory methods revealed that 10 isolates expressed similar results and 6 isolates expressed different results. All Salmonella isolates were positive by polymerase chain reaction assay for invA gene; which agreed with previous studies about the existence of the invA in Salmonella around the world. The detection of those genes in huge number of Salmonella isolates from different geographical location maybe associated with the ability of the isolates for cell invasion (Amini et al. 2010, Campioni et al. 2012, Crăciunaş et al. 2012). PCR is a useful and rapid tool for Salmonella spp detection in clinical samples., where invA and the sopB genes may be a target gene for the detection of this genus, as both genes associated with the virulence of Salmonella enteritis in birds (Hughes et al. 2008, Wood et al. 1998). The avrA gene prevalence showed 100% detection in all salmonella isolates similar to the detection rate found in previous report focused on Salmonella Enteritidis (Hopkins . and Threlfall 2004), while in other reports lower detection rate for this gene of Salmonella Enteritidis (Liu et al. 2012, Rahman et al. 2004, Streckel et al. 2004, Zou et al. 2010) was reported. The variation in detection rate maybe associated with the variation of recombination location of these genes (Hopkins . and Threlfall 2004). These findings are important, since variation in the repertoire of those genes, such as avrA and sopE, can be associated with the variation of these serovars ability to adapt to new

| Isolate     | Cefinase® | CDD | Genotypic resistance genes |
|-------------|-----------|-----|----------------------------|
| S. Kentucky | Negative  | Positive | bla<sub>TEM</sub>          |
| S. Kentucky | Negative  | Positive | bla<sub>TEM</sub>          |
| S. Infants  | Positive  | Negative | bla<sub>TEM</sub>          |
| S. Infants  | Positive  | Negative | bla<sub>TEM</sub>          |
| S. Agona    | Positive  | Negative | bla<sub>TEM</sub>          |

Table 5. Comparison between Cefinase® and combined disk diffusion test as phenotypic methods for detection of ESβLs.

| Positive isolates | Cefinase® | 13 | 13 |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----|----|
| Negative isolates                                      | 37        |    | 37 |
| Shared isolates                                        | 10        |    | 10 |
| Different isolates                                     | 3         |    | 3  |
| Cefinase® +ve / Genotypic -ve                          | (1/16) 6.25% |     |    |
| Cefinase® -ve / Genotypic +ve                          | (3/15) 20% |    |    |
| Cefinase® +ve / Genotypic +ve                          | (12/15) 80% |    |    |
| CDD +ve / Genotypic -ve                                | ----------|    | 0  |
| CDD -ve / Genotypic +ve                                | ----------|    | (3/15) 20% |
| CDD +ve / Genotypic +ve                                | ----------|    | (13/15) 86.6% |

Table 6. Genotypic results of the 6 isolates different in ESβLs pattern detected by phenotypic methods.
host cells and consequently provoke the emergence of novel virulent strains (Prager et al. 2000). The obtained data from this study showed a high percentage (100%) of Salmonella Enteritidis isolates that had the *avrA* gene; while, only 17.1% and 9.7% of Salmonella Hadar isolates possessed the *avrA* and *sopE* genes, respectively, which showed difference in the pattern of those genes among different *Salmonella* serovars. (Cesco et al. 2009). Some reports associated the high frequency of *avrA* gene in serovars that are considered as the most pathological agents of salmonellosis in poultry farms (Ben-Barak et al. 2006). The obtained data from the current study showed significant association between *inv*, *avrA*, *sopB*, *stn* and *bcfC* virulence genes and resistance to the commonly used antibiotics in Egypt (Table-4/5) as previously observed in Senegal and Gambia but with different virulence genes and antimicrobials resistant genes (Dione et al. 2011). These correlations could be explained based on the mechanisms involved in the pathogenicity of bacteria and the acquisition of resistance genes by *Salmonella* species. In the pathogenic bacterial isolates the vast majority of molecular pathogenicity determinant fragments located specific bacterial plasmid (virulence-associated plasmids) or chromosome (Groisman . and Ochman 1996, Hacker et al. 1997). The MDR genes may be located on bacterial chromosome either segmented inside chromosome or located as extra chromosomal genetic elements within the chromosome that originate from other genomes (Carattoli 2003). The simultaneous detection of both types of genes either different types of virulence gene or antimicrobial resistance genes has been frequently reported in different *salmonella* species (Carattoli 2003).

**CONCLUSION**

The data obtained from this study, suggests that broilers play a potential role as a reservoir of multi drug resistant *Salmonella* serovars with special reference to ESβL serovars; which contain many virulence genes that magnify the disease condition and imply failure of control.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

All authors declare no conflict of interest
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