

1 **Original Research Article**

2 **Antimicrobial Resistant Genes in Non-typhoidal**  
3 ***Salmonella* Species in Food and Stool Samples**  
4 **in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria**

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14 **ABSTRACT**  
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**Background:** Non-typhoidal *Salmonella* (NTS) species are the major cause of foodborne infection.

**Aim:** To analyze antimicrobial resistant genes found in non-typhoidal *Salmonella* species in food and stool samples in Port Harcourt using molecular methods.

**Study Design:** This was a cross-sectional study with simple randomized sampling.

**Methodology:** In this study, 12 *Salmonella*-positive isolates gotten from food and stool samples in Port Harcourt were subjected to antimicrobial sensitivity testing using disc diffusion method of the commonly prescribed antibiotics in the city. Molecular techniques were employed to determine the presence of TET-W and CTX-M resistant genes, and also phylogenetic relationships.

**Results:** Out of 12 isolates [7 (3.3%) food samples and 5 (2.4%) stool samples], all (100.0%) were sensitive to ofloxacin, imipenem, levofloxacin, and gentamicin. High sensitivity was also observed to be ciprofloxacin (92.0%) and ceftriaxone (75.0%). However, complete resistance (100.0%) was recorded against tetracycline and cefotaxime. Resistance to cefpodoxime-proxetil (16.7%) and amikacin (8.3%) was exclusive to food isolates. Clinical isolates showed 20.0% resistance compared to 23.0% in food isolates, with none being sensitive to all antibiotics tested. Resistance patterns by antibiotic class indicated 0.0% resistance to fluoroquinolones, 4.2% to aminoglycosides, 25.0% to beta-lactams, and 100.0% to tetracycline. Multiple Antibiotic Resistance (MAR) analysis revealed that 75.0% of isolates had MAR indices >0.2, significantly higher ( $p = .0143$ ) than those with MAR <0.2. Notably, all isolates with MAR indices >0.2 were obtained from Obio/Akpor. PCR assays confirmed the presence of resistance genes, with TET-W detected in all tested stool and food isolates, while CTX-M was found in 25.0% of food isolates but not in stool isolates.

**Conclusion:** There was a total resistance to tetracycline antibiotics. More antimicrobial resistance was noted in food samples than clinical samples which could have arisen from the use of antibiotics in the agricultural activities or improper handling of food by vendors.

16  
17 **Keywords:** Non-typhoidal *Salmonella*, antimicrobial resistance, foodborne disease  
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19 **1. INTRODUCTION**

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21 Ten percent of the world's population suffers from foodborne infections, which also cause 33  
22 million deaths annually [1]. The high prevalence of *Salmonella enterica* is of great public  
23 health concern due to their detection in several foods, including fish, poultry, vegetables, and  
24 shellfish [2, 3]. This trend in *Salmonella* infection has been attributed to poor or lack of  
25 proper sanitary procedures in the food chain (conservation, transit, processing, and  
26 marketing) [3, 4]. Typhi and Paratyphi are common serovars of *S. enterica* that cause severe  
27 systemic typhoid fever in humans [5]. However, other species of *Salmonella* cause  
28 gastroenteritis which are often referred to as nontyphoidal *Salmonella* (NTS). The serovars  
29 belonging to this category include *Salmonella* ser. Typhimurium and *Salmonella* ser.  
30 Enteritidis [5, 6].

31 There are estimated 1.3 billion cases of acute gastroenteritis per year, resulting in 3 million  
32 deaths [7]. Africa has a high mortality rate, with 4,100 deaths annually, or 320 deaths per  
33 100,000 people [8]. Variations in serovar fitness, virulence factors, and host vulnerability are  
34 linked to the disease's severity and prognosis [9]. The evolution of resistance in these  
35 pathogens to antimicrobials poses a worldwide risk to the health of both humans and  
36 animals. This resistance development further led to difficulty in clinical management of the  
37 patients infected with antibiotic-resistant bacteria with increased likelihood of these resistant  
38 diseases spreading [10, 11]. This raises serious alarm as a significant portion of the  
39 antibiotic-resistant *Salmonella* has been obtained from eating tainted food that originated  
40 from animals, putting human health at risk and driving up medical expenses [12, 13].  
41 Antimicrobial-resistant infections are expected to cause 10 million fatalities globally by 2050,  
42 according to some experts [14].

43 The adoption of antibiotics in animal husbandry in several regions in the world has further  
44 increased the chances of the spread of resistant strains of infectious agents. *Salmonella*  
45 species which develop resistance to extended-spectrum cephalosporins have been  
46 discovered from chickens. The consumption of these poultry products could potentially  
47 cause resistant infection [15, 16]. Resistant *Salmonella* infection has been connected to  
48 higher fatality and poorer clinical outcomes [17]. Based on the laws and initiatives put in  
49 place to combat illness, different nations have different reporting prevalence rates of  
50 salmonellosis. Despite the growing number of reports of non-typhoidal *Salmonella*, a  
51 particularly invasive, multidrug-resistant strain in Sub-Saharan Africa, surveillance,  
52 documentation, and reporting of salmonellosis are frequently inadequate and dispersed over  
53 the African region [4,18,19]. Developing effective control methods requires a thorough  
54 understanding of the molecular epidemiology and antibiotic resistance profiles of *Salmonella*  
55 isolates, particularly in nations like Nigeria where the disease is highly prevalent [18,19].

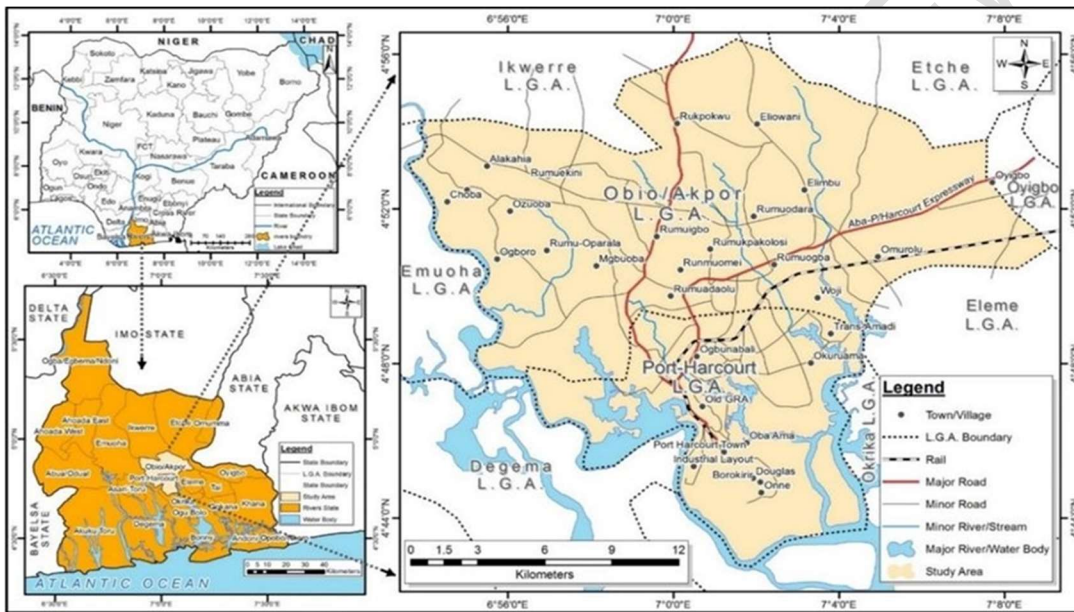
56 Determining the antimicrobial profile of this disease is crucial in order to identify the most  
57 effective medications for treating salmonellosis, which is a disease that affects people of all  
58 demographics. Currently, there is paucity of data on this NTS in Nigeria. As a follow up to a  
59 previous demographic study on the prevalence of NTS in food and clinical samples [20], this  
60 study evaluated the antimicrobial profile of non-typhoidal *Salmonella* as well as evaluating  
61 the antimicrobial resistance genes of this pathogen. Laboratories in Nigeria hardly perform  
62 susceptibility testing on positive *Salmonella* stool cultures leading to misuse of antibiotics in  
63 treatment, therefore, it is justifiable that this study will provide salient data on antibiotic  
64 regimen in the treatment of salmonellosis. This research brings to light the prevalence of  
65 *Salmonella* in locally made food.

66 **2. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

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68 **2.1 Study Area**

69 The study was carried out in Port Harcourt of Rivers State located in the oil rich Niger Delta  
70 of Nigeria. Port Harcourt is situated within latitude 4°49'27" N and longitude 7°2'1" E with an  
71 estimated population of 3,480,101 and a land area of 369 km<sup>2</sup>. The study worked on  
72 isolating NTS species from food and clinical samples. Hence, the food samples were  
73 obtained from street food vendors within Port Harcourt metropolis. The clinical samples were  
74 obtained from the Rivers State University Teaching Hospital (RSUTH) and University of Port  
75 Harcourt Teaching Hospital (UPTH), others were collected from medical laboratories and  
76 identified individuals presenting with gastroenteritis in the Port Harcourt metropolis.



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78 **Map 1. Map of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria** (Adapted from Ogbozige and Toko,  
79 [21]).

80 **2.2 Selection Criteria**

81 Individuals with visible sign and symptoms of gastroenteritis such as vomiting, diarrhea,  
82 nausea, bloody stool were included in the study. Individuals on any antibiotics were  
83 excluded. Foods included in this study were freshly dished. Waste foods were excluded from  
84 the study.

85 **2.3 Sample Collection**

86 From December 2022 to November 2023, a cross-sectional approach was utilized to collect  
87 stool samples from suspected individuals with gastroenteritis were collected using a vial.  
88 Subjects were given clear guidance on how to avoid contamination. The clinical samples  
89 were either processed directly or sent to the medical microbiology laboratory of Rivers State

90 University where processing took place immediately. Clinical samples that were not  
91 immediately cultured were stored in the freezer at -4°C prior to experiments.

## 92 **2.4 Sample size**

93 The study used a prevalence of 16.3% determined by Akinyemi et al. [22]. Using the  
94 Cochran's equation of sample size =  $\frac{Z.Z.p.q}{e.e}$ , the appropriate sample size given the specified  
95 combination of precision, confidence and variability was 209.6. Hence, the sample size  
96 adopted for both clinical samples and food samples was 210 each.

## 97 **2.5 Bacterial Isolation**

98 Stool specimens were prepared in Selenite F Broth and incubated at 37°C for 18 hours. The  
99 overnight culture was sub-cultured unto *Salmonella-Shigella* Agar (SSA) and bismuth sulfite  
100 agar (BSA) and incubated for 18 hours at 37°C. For the food samples, a 1:10 dilution of each  
101 food sample was made by weighing and homogenizing 10 g of the food sample and  
102 dissolving it in 90 mL of peptone water. 1 mL of the dissolved sample was transferred  
103 aseptically into 10 mL of sterile Selenite F Broth and incubated at 37°C for 24 hours. The  
104 overnight culture was sub-cultured unto *Salmonella-Shigella* Agar (SSA) and BSA and  
105 incubated for 18 hours at 37°C. In all, twelve isolates were recovered (5 out of 210 stool  
106 samples and 7 out of 210 food samples). The isolates recovered were subjected to  
107 biochemical tests (triple sugar iron test, Urease and Indole test) and were kept in nutrient  
108 agar slants in an incubator for further testing.

## 109 **2.6 Antimicrobial Susceptibility profiling**

110 Antimicrobial susceptibility test was done using the Kirby-Bauer disk diffusion technique as  
111 recommended by the Clinical and Laboratory Standard Institute (CLSI) [23]. Five mL tryptic  
112 soya broth (OXOID, England) was inoculated with test isolates and incubated at 35°C for  
113 4 hours. Culture of each isolate was compared with 0.5 McFarland turbidity standards. Using  
114 swabs, isolates were inoculated on Mueller-Hinton agar, and the inoculated plates were  
115 allowed to dry for 30 minutes at room temperature. The isolates were tested for their  
116 susceptibility to fourteen (14) antimicrobial agents with the following disc contents;  
117 tetracycline (30 µg), amoxicillin/clavulanic acid (30 µg), ciprofloxacin (5 µg), gentamicin (120  
118 µg), ofloxacin (5 µg), ceftriaxone (30 µg), cefpodoxime-proxetil (10 µg), cefuroxime (30 µg),  
119 cefotaxime (30µg), ceftazidime (30 µg), imipenem (30 µg), levofloxacin (10 µg), cefepime  
120 (30 µg), and amikacin (30 µg ). Muller-Hinton agar cultures were coated with antibiotic-  
121 impregnated discs, which were then incubated for 20 hours at 37°C. Using the CLSI  
122 interpretive chart, the widths of the zones of inhibition were measured to the nearest  
123 millimeter and categorized as resistant, moderate, or susceptible [24].

## 124 **2.7 Determination of Multiple Antibiotic Resistance (MAR) Index**

125 For the determination of the MAR index, the formular  $MAR = \frac{a}{b}$  was used, where 'a'  
126 represents the number of antibiotics to which the test isolate showed resistance and 'b'  
127 represents the total number of antibiotics to which the test isolate was subjected to for  
128 susceptibility.

## 129 **2.8 Molecular Analysis**

### 130 **2.8.1 DNA Extraction**

131 Logarithmic phase cultures (1.5 mL) were harvested by centrifugation at 10,000 rpm for 5  
132 minutes. The bacterial DNA was extracted using the HotSHOT DNA Extraction Kit (Qiagen)  
133 according to manufacturer's instructions. The extracted DNA was collected and quantified  
134 using Nanodrop before storage at -20°C until further use.

## 135 **2.8.2 Detection Bacteria 16S rRNA and Antimicrobial Resistance Genes**

136 Conventional PCR was performed to amplify the variable region (V4) of the 16S rRNA gene  
137 using primers in **Table 1**. 20 µL PCR reaction mixture (4 µL of 5x master mix, 0.4 µL of each  
138 10 µM 16S rRNA, TET-W and CTX-M primers (to achieve a final concentration of 0.2 µM),  
139 13.2 µL of molecular-grade water, and 2 µL of extracted DNA. PCR amplification was  
140 performed using the Applied Biosystems PCR Thermal Cycler 9700 with the following  
141 conditions: 5 min at 94°C; 35 cycles of 40 s at 94°C, 40 s at 58°C, and 1 minute 30 s at  
142 72°C; 5 minutes at 72°C. This was followed by gel electrophoresis where a 2% agarose gel  
143 was prepared by dissolving 0.6g agarose powder in 30 mL 1X Tris-Borate-EDTA (TBE)  
144 buffer. Safe Green dye (30 µL) was added for visibility. The gel, with pre-placed wells for  
145 PCR products, solidified, and the comb was removed. PCR products (4 µL loaded buffers  
146 each) and a marker lane were loaded into the wells. Electrophoresis was conducted, and the  
147 gel was visualized under a UV transilluminator. Positive bacterial samples were expected to  
148 show a band size around 292 bp following 16S rRNA PCR, 168 bp (TET-W), and 255 bp  
149 (CTX-M).

150 **Table 1: List of Primers used for PCR Amplification**

Target	Forward	Reverse
16S rRNA	5'-GTGYCAGCMGCCGCGGTAA-3'	5'-GGACTACNVGGGTWTCTAAT-3'
TET-W	5'-GAGAGCCTGCTATATGCCAGC-3'	5'-GGGCGTATCCACAATGTTAAC-3'
CTX-M	5'-GTGATACCACTTCACCTC-3'	5'-AGTAAGTGACCAGAATCAG-3'

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## 152 **Data Analyses**

153 The results were presented as percentages, Mean±SD, photographs and bar charts. The  
154 statistical package used was GraphPad Prism. The statistical tools used for the analyses  
155 were Chi-square and t-test. The statistical significance was considered at 95% confidence  
156 interval.

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## 158 **3. RESULTS**

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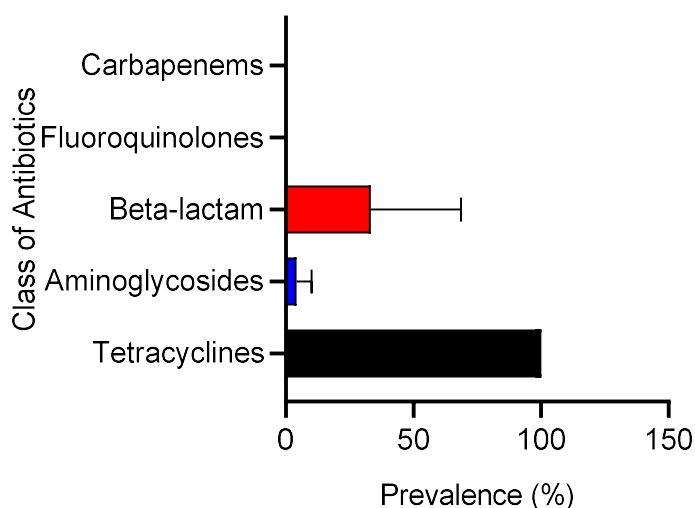
### 160 **3.1 Antimicrobial Susceptibility Patterns of the Isolates**

161 *Salmonella* isolates showed either sensitive, resistant or intermediate susceptibility to test  
162 antibiotics as shown in **Table 2**. Out of the 12 isolates obtained 7 (3.3%) were recorded for  
163 food samples and 5 (2.4%) stool samples. The highest rate of resistance to tetracycline was  
164 12 (100.0%) and cefotaxime 12 (100.0%) were recorded. Five (42.0%) of the isolates were  
165 resistant to amoxicillin + clavulanic acid while three (25.0%) were resistant to cefuroxime.  
166 Resistance to cefpodoxime-proxetil (16.7%) and Amikacin (8.3%) were associated only with  
167 food isolates (two out of seven for cefpodoxime- proxetil and one out of seven for amikacin).  
168 Overall, there was a 20% resistance in the clinical isolates compared to 23% resistance  
169 among the food isolates. In terms of antibiotic classes, the isolates showed no resistance to  
170 the fluoroquinolones (0.0%), carbapenems (0.0%), but the highest resistance 100% against  
171 tetracycline (**Fig. 1**).

172 **Table 2. Antimicrobial susceptibility in percentages of *Salmonella* isolates.**

Antibiotic Class	Antibiotic	N = 12			
		Sensitive (%)	Intermediate (%)	Resistant (%)	
Carbapenems	Imipenem (R ≤ 19, I = 14 – 15, S ≥ 16)	12 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	
Cephalosporins	Amoxicillin-Clavulanic acid (R ≤ 13, I = 14 – 17, S ≥ 18)	1 (8.3)	6 (50.0)	5 (41.7)	
	Cefotaxime (R ≤ 14, I = 15 – 22, S ≥ 23)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	12 (100)	
	Cefpodoxime-Proxetil (R ≤ 14, I = 15 – 22, S ≥ 23)	3 (25.0)	7 (58.3)	2 (16.7)	
	Ceftazidime (R ≤ 14, I = 15 – 17, S ≥ 18)	1 (8.3)	9 (75.0)	2 (16.7)	
	Cefepime (R ≤ 14, I = 15 – 17, S ≥ 18)	8 (66.7)	4 (33.3)	0 (0)	
	Cefuroxime (R ≤ 14, I = 15 – 22, S ≥ 23)	5 (41.7)	4 (33.3)	3 (25.0)	
	Ceftriaxone (R ≤ 13, I = 14 – 20, S ≥ 21)	9 (75)	3 (25)	0 (0)	
	Aminoglycosides	Amikacin (R ≤ 14, I = 15 – 16, S ≥ 17)	8 (66.7)	3 (25.0)	1 (8.3)
		Gentamicin (R ≤ 17, I = 18 – 19, S ≥ 20)	12 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Tetracyclines	Tetracycline (R ≤ 14, I = 15 – 18, S ≥ 19)	0 (0)	0 (0)	12 (100)	
Fluoroquinolones	Ofloxacin (R ≤ 12, I = 13 – 15, S ≥ 16)	12 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	
	Ciprofloxacin (R ≤ 15, I = 16 – 20, S ≥ 21)	11 (91.7)	1 (8.3)	0 (0)	
	Levofloxacin (R ≤ 13, I = 14 – 16, S ≥ 17)	12 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	

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**Fig.1. Prevalence of Resistance by Antibiotic Classes**

**3.2 Multiple Antibiotic Resistance (MAR) Index of the Isolates**

The MAR indices analysis of the isolated bacteria revealed that 9 isolates (75%) had MAR indices greater than 0.2 which were significantly higher ( $p = .0143$ ) than those less than 0.2 3 (25%). The *Salmonella* isolates which had MAR indices greater than 0.2 were mostly *Salmonella* isolates obtained from food samples 6 (66.7%). Notably, all the isolates with MAR indices greater than 0.2 were isolated from only one of the local government areas, Obio/Akpor 9 (100%) (Table 3).

**Table 3. Distribution of the Isolates based on MAR Index**

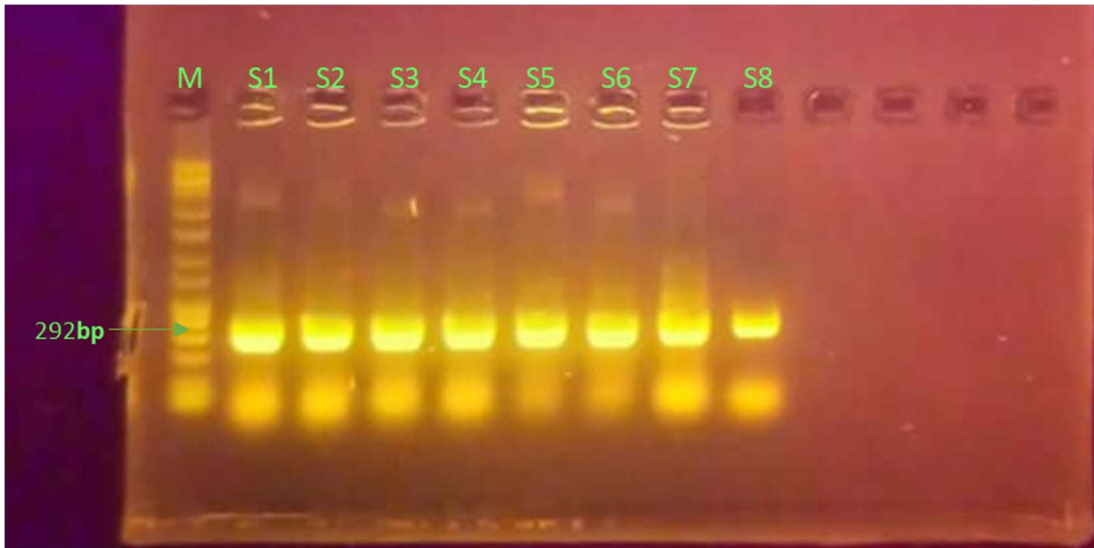
MAR Index	Total Isolates (%)	Sample Types		Geographical Locations		
		of Food (%)	Stool (%)	Obio/Akpor Isolates (%)	Ikwerre Isolates (%)	PHALGA Isolates (%)
< 0.2	3 (25)	1 (33.3)	2 (66.7)	3 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
> 0.2	9 (75)	6 (66.7)	3 (33.3)	9 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
p-value	.0143	.0075	.5271	.0143	-	-

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Key: MAR= Multiple Antibiotic Resistance

**3.3 Confirmation of 16s Ribosomal RNA of Bacterial Isolates**

PCR technique successfully detected the V4 region of the 16S rRNA gene specific to *Salmonella* species in the samples. Figure 2 shows the gel electrophoresis picture of 6 representatives of the 12 isolates, and they could be confirmed to be 292 bp band size which was expected. This validates the specificity of the PCR assay for bacteria species identification.

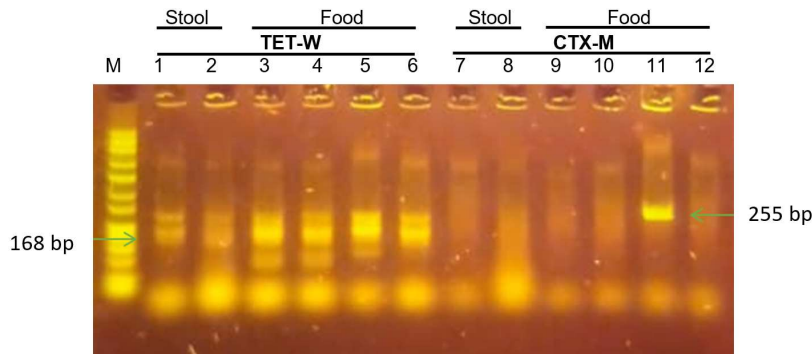


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**Fig. 2. Bands Generated from 16S rRNA Amplification.** Lane M is 1 kb Ladder, S1-6 are culture samples positive for bacteria while S7-8 are control samples.

### 3.4 Antimicrobial Resistance Genes Detection

PCR assays targeting TET-W and CTX-M resistance genes resulted in specific amplicons of the expected sizes. Gel electrophoresis confirmed the presence of these resistance genes in the bacterial cultures, providing insights into their antibiotic resistance profiles (**Figure 3**). The TET-W primers amplified six of 168 bp amplicons while the CTX-M primers amplified a 255 bp product. While all the tested *Salmonella* isolates 2 (100%) from the stool samples used showed TET-W genes, none 0 (0%) showed a CTX-M gene. On the other hand, all the *Salmonella* assessed isolates 4 (100%) from food samples also showed the presence of TET-W but only one 1 (25%) showed CTX-M gene (Table 4).



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**Plate 1. Representative bands that are positive for TET-W and CTX-M antimicrobial genes.** Lane M is 1 kb Ladder, S1-6 are culture isolates amplified with TET-W primers while S1b-6b were amplified with CTX-M primers.



222 **Table 4. Prevalence of Antimicrobial Resistant Genes in NTS species.**

Sample	CTX-M n (%)	TET-W n (%)
Stool	0 (0)	2 (100)
Food	1 (25)	4 (100)
Total	1 (100)	6 (100)
p-value	.4945	>0.9999

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#### 225 4. DISCUSSION

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227 The high burden of NTS has led to a huge economic burden which has affected the  
 228 healthcare setting [25]. This study elucidated the prevalence of antibiotics resistance among  
 229 NTS species among patients and food samples collected from Port Harcourt in Nigeria. In  
 230 our study, a disturbing trend noted was the complete resistance (100%) to tetracycline and  
 231 cefotaxime was observed among all isolates. These antibiotics belong to the tetracyclines  
 232 and third generation cephalosporins respectively. These results align with previous studies  
 233 by Adedokun *et al.* [20] who reported high resistance of *Salmonella* serovars isolated from  
 234 food, animals and human samples in Lagos of Nigeria to cefuroxime and ceftazidime.  
 235 Similarly, Akinyemi *et al.* [22] reported cefuroxime and ceftazidime resistance  
 236 in *Salmonella* species from febrile patients. Outside Nigeria, a 2015 study demonstrated high  
 237 resistance to tetracycline from retail aquaculture products however was lower than those  
 238 found in this study [27]. In the same country, raw chicken, of commercial broilers exhibited  
 239 high resistance to cefotaxime and tetracycline. Put together, these studies have shown  
 240 extensive evidence of increasing resistance of *Salmonella* to tetracycline due to its extensive  
 241 use in food-producing animals.

242 In another study in Lagos, Akinyemi *et al.* [22] reported amoxicillin + clavulanic acid,  
 243 cefuroxime and ceftazidime resistance in *Salmonella* species from febrile patients. A 2015  
 244 study in Shanghai, China by Zhang *et al* [27] reported high resistance of *Salmonella*  
 245 serovars from retail aquaculture products to tetracycline. Similar antibiotic-resistant patterns  
 246 were observed in a study by Li *et al.* [28] on *Salmonella* serovars isolated from raw chicken  
 247 carcasses of commercial broilers and spent hens in Tai'an, China, the *Salmonella* isolates  
 248 showed high resistance to. The resistance observed against amoxicillin-clavulanic acid  
 249 (42%) and cefuroxime (25%) suggests a potential reduction in the efficacy of these  
 250 antibiotics for treating *Salmonella* infections, particularly in clinical settings [29]. The  
 251 observation of intermediate susceptibility among isolates to ceftazidime (66.6%) and  
 252 cefpodoxime-proxetil (58.3%) suggests a gradual shift towards resistance, which has been  
 253 previously reported in various surveillance studies [30].

254 Besides these resistance phenotypes, the *Salmonella* isolates also demonstrated some  
 255 sensitivity patterns to the different classes of antibiotics. Notably, all isolates exhibited  
 256 complete sensitivity to ofloxacin, imipenem, levofloxacin, and gentamicin, indicating the  
 257 continued efficacy of fluoroquinolones and carbapenems against *Salmonella* spp. This  
 258 finding is consistent with previous studies that have reported low resistance rates of  
 259 *Salmonella* to fluoroquinolones [31]. Additionally, high sensitivity to ciprofloxacin (92.0%) and  
 260 ceftriaxone (75.0%) suggests that these antibiotics remain viable treatment options in Port  
 261 Harcourt, as corroborated by recent reports in the literature [31].

262 In terms of resistance to antibiotic classes, majority of the isolates were resistant to the  
 263 tetracycline, followed by  $\beta$ -lactam antibiotics then aminoglycoside which is corroborated by  
 264 the report of Adedokun *et al.* [26] but contrasts that of Pławińska-Czarnak *et al.* [32] who  
 265 reported a higher resistance to aminoglycoside than  $\beta$ -lactams in *Salmonella* isolated from

266 raw meat in Poland. Although increasing resistance of *Salmonella* to quinolones have been  
267 reported, in this study majority of the isolates were susceptible to ofloxacin, gentamicin and  
268 ciprofloxacin. This difference in susceptibility might be due to the source of isolates since  
269 clinical isolates are known to be more resistant to quinolones and most of the isolates in this  
270 study were from non-clinical samples.

271 The Multiple Antibiotic Resistance (MAR) index analysis revealed that 75% of isolates had  
272 MAR indices greater than 0.2, indicating exposure to high-risk antibiotic environments [24].  
273 The significantly higher prevalence ( $p = 0.0143$ ) of MAR indices  $>0.2$  among food isolates  
274 (66.7%) compared to clinical isolates aligns with previous studies suggesting that food  
275 sources may act as reservoirs for resistant *Salmonella* strains [34]. Interestingly, all isolates  
276 with MAR indices greater than 0.2 were obtained from the Obio/Akpor local government  
277 area, suggesting localized antibiotic selection pressures that may contribute to resistance  
278 spread. A recent study corroborated this trend through the demonstration that Obio/Akpor  
279 has high prevalence of resistance pathogens [35].

280 The molecular analysis via PCR further confirmed the presence of resistance genes,  
281 providing genetic evidence for the observed phenotypic resistance. The detection of TET-W  
282 genes in all stool isolates (100%) and all tested food isolates (100%) strongly supports  
283 tetracycline resistance, in agreement with earlier reports identifying TET-W genes in  
284 foodborne *Salmonella* [34]. The detection of CTX-M genes in only 25% of food isolates and  
285 none from stool samples suggests that extended-spectrum beta-lactamase (ESBL)  
286 production is still emerging among these isolates, though continued surveillance is  
287 necessary.

288 These findings have opened the avenue for stringent antibiotic stewardship and enhanced  
289 surveillance of antimicrobial resistance in both food and clinical settings. This present study  
290 had some important limitations. First, the sampling was carried out over a relatively short  
291 period of time. Again, the study could have explored the presence of resistance genes on  
292 the plasmid. This is because several studies have shown that plasmids harbor resistance  
293 genes as a form of adaptational measure to harsh conditions [36, 37, 38].

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## 295 **5. CONCLUSION**

296 More NTS strains were observed in food samples (3.3%) than stool samples (2.4%). The  
297 NTS strains demonstrated 100% resistance to tetracycline and cefotaxime. This phenotypic  
298 attribute was confirmed by the molecular detection of TET-W gene in all the bacterial  
299 isolates. Also, bacteria exhibiting MAR indices of  $>0.2$  was significantly higher than those  
300 having MAR indices of  $<0.2$  which indicates that majority of the bacteria have had prior  
301 transient exposure to antibiotics.  
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## CONSENT

All authors declare that a written informed consent was obtained from the patient. A copy of the written consent is available for review by the Editorial office of this journal.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

All authors hereby declare that all experiments have been examined and approved by the Rivers State Health Research Ethical Committee with REC number RSUTH/REC/202319 in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki.

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441

## ABBREVIATIONS

442

443

NTS - Non-typhoidal *Salmonella*

444

RSUTH - Rivers State University Teaching Hospital

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UPTH - University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital

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SSA - *Salmonella Shigella* agar

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BSA - Bismuth sulfite agar

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