Antimicrobial Effect of Different Types of Honey on Selected ATCC Bacterial Strains

Aaseel Aljaghwani1, Khaled S. Allemaleim1, Lujain F. Aljaghwani2, Faris Alrumaihi1, Rejo Jacob Joseph3, Amjad Ali Khan3, Mohammad aljaghwani4, Arshad H. Rahmani1, Ahmad Almatroudi1,*

1Department of Medical Laboratories, College of Applied Medical Sciences, Qassim University, Buraydah, SAUDI ARABIA.
2Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Maternity and Children Hospital, Buraydah, SAUDI ARABIA.
3Department of Basic Health Sciences, College of Applied Medical Sciences, Qassim University, Buraydah, SAUDI ARABIA.
4Department of Cardiovascular and Catheter Laboratory, Prince Sultan Center for Cardiovascular Medicine and Surgery, Buraydah, SAUDI ARABIA.

Correspondence
Ahmad Almatroudi
Department of Medical Laboratories, College of Applied Medical Sciences, Qassim University, Buraydah, SAUDI ARABIA.
E-mail: ammatrody@qu.edu.sa

ABSTRACT
Honey is a complex sweet highly viscous liquid and is composed of various ingredients such as sugar, proteins, minerals, and polyphenolic compounds. Honey is used in traditional medicine systems for centuries because of its ability to inhibit the pathogenesis of various diseases through modulating various biological activities. In this study, antimicrobial potential of different types of honey was tested against selected pathogenic bacterial strains through agar well diffusion method. Four types of honey were used in the present investigation, and the potential antimicrobial activities of these varieties were further compared with that of antibiotics commonly used against targeted microbial strains. Among all of the four tested honey, three types were classified as blossom honey, being Talha (Acacia sp) honey (TH), Zahoor (mixed flower) honey (ZH), and Manuka (Leptospermum based honey) honey (MH). Both gram positive and gram negative bacterial species were used for this investigation. The pathogenic gram-positive bacterial strains included Staphylococcus aureus ATCC 29213, Enterococcus faecalis ATCC 29212 and methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus (MRSA) ATCC 43200. Three gram negative bacteria like Escherichia coli ATCC 25922, Klebsiella pneumonia ATCC 700603, and Pseudomonas aeruginosa ATCC 27853 were also used to confirm the antimicrobial activities. As reflected from our study, we found that three varieties of honey including TH, ZH, and MH (with different UMF +20, +16, +5) displayed a broad spectrum antibacterial activity against all tested microbial strains. However, all strains showed a high frequency of resistance to BF honey. Gram-positive (G+) bacteria were found to be more sensitive to all tested honey types except (BF) as indicated by significantly higher zone of inhibition (ZOI) values than those of gram-negative (G-) bacteria. As a conclusion, this study suggests that antimicrobial potential of honey types might be helpful in order to treat the pathogenic microorganisms threatening the public health and changing antibiotics into last-resort drugs.

Key Words: Talha honey, Zahoor honey and Manuka honey, Staphylococcus aureus, Enterococcus faecalis.

INTRODUCTION
Honey is a complex sweet liquid with greater viscosity made by bees. It is graded by color, with clear, golden amber and darker honey. The flavor of each type of honey varies, depending on the type of flowers.1 Honey is a complex food substance, comprised of approximately 200 different substances, including sugar, water, proteins, vitamins, minerals, polyphenolic compounds and plant derivatives.2,3 Honey can be classified as honeyedw and blossom. Honeyedw honey is produced by collection of living plant, aphid and insect secretions whereas blossom honey is produced by collection of flower nectar and characterized by pollen content. Blossom honey can be subdivided into uni-floral, which is from one flower species, or multi-flora where multiple sources of flower species. The composition of active compounds present within plant nectar can vary, depending on geographical location and climate conditions.4,5 Honey has antimicrobial and antioxidant properties in which the first observations of the antimicrobial activity of honey described in 1892. The honey has then been observed to have a broad spectrum of activity. It can also inhibit both Gram positive and Gram negative organisms including Escherichia coli, Pseudomonas aeruginosa, Klebsiella pneumoniae, Staphylococcus aureus, Bacillus subtilis and Listeria monocytogenes and their multidrug-resistant counterparts.6,7 Observing the broad spectrum of activity showed by honey, mostly against MDR and many types of antibiotics have led to investigate honey-antibiotic synergy with some promising effects.8 Honey contain different types of substances contributing to eradicate and kill microbial pathogen and these substances are classified into two categories, being direct inhibitory factors affecting the cellular mechanism such as polyphonic component, hydrogen peroxide, methylglyoxal (MGO) and bee-defensin1, and indirect inhibitory factors which have a wider ranging effect on the bacterial cell such as high osmotic pressure, high sugar content and low pH.9 A recent study showed that Manuka +20, Manuka +16 and Manuka +10 have strong antibacterial activities against both sensitive and resistant P. aeruginosa strains in addition to P. aeruginosa ATCC 27853 which served as control. A previous study showed that Manuka honey of lower UMF grade demonstrated equal to significantly increased antimicrobial activity compared to higher
UMF grade honey for all tested organisms. The study included 128 bacterial organisms that were selected for antimicrobial susceptibility testing, being coagulase-positive and coagulase-negative *Staphylococcus*, enteric gram-negative bacilli and *P. aeruginosa*. MRSA and some MDR bacteria were included. 10,11

A very recent study demonstrated that Talha honey had higher antimicrobial activity than Sidr honey which showed strong antibacterial activities against pathogenic gram-positive bacteria including *Bacillus cereus* and *S. aureus*, and gram-negative bacteria including *E. coli* and *Salmonella enteritidis*. A previous study showed that black forest honey had highest antibacterial activity against *P. aeruginosa* ATCC 27853 and least with *E. coli* ATCC 25922. 13

This study aimed to evaluate the antimicrobial potential of different types of honey including Talha (Acacia sp.) honey, Zahoor honey (mixed flower) and Manuka honey (Leptospermum based honey) with different UMF (+20, +16, +5) against selected pathogenic bacterial strains. Their potential antimicrobial activities were also compared with that of antibiotics commonly used against targeted microbial strains.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Honey samples**

Four types of honey were used. Three types were classified as blossom honey, being Talha (Acacia sp) honey, Zahoor honey (mixed flower) and Manuka honey (Leptospermum based honey) with different UMF (+20, +16, +5). These honeys are usually made from the nectar of the flowers. One type is classified as honeydew, being Black Forest honey which is produced from trees. It can also be produced from larger species of grasses and plants (Table 1).

All types of honey were collected from apiaries of selected regions among countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Germany and New Zealand for in vitro analysis purposes in order to determine their antimicrobial activities against selected pathogenic bacterial strains.

**Microbial strains**

The pathogenic bacterial strains included three gram-positive bacteria, being *Staphylococcus aureus* ATCC 29213, *Enterococcus faecalis* ATCC 29212 and methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus* (MRSA) ATCC 43300. Three gram-negative bacteria, being *Escherichia coli* ATCC 25922, *Klebsiella pneumonia* ATCC 700603 and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* ATCC 27853 were also included. All strains were obtained from the bacterial cultures stocks and supplied by the Department of microbiology, College of Applied medical sciences, Qassim University.

**Assessment of antibacterial activity**

Agar well diffusion method was used to determine the antimicrobial potential of different types of honey. Muller-Hinton agar and Muller-Hinton agar with 5% sheep blood were used. Bacterial suspension from pure isolates of each microbe were prepared in Muller-Hinton broth under aseptic condition. The density of each suspension was adjusted with 0.5% McFarland standard. The tested organisms were then inoculated into MHA using lown culture technique.

**RESULTS**

Different types of honey including Talha (TH), Zahoor (ZH), and Manuka (MH) with different UMF +20, +16, +5 and Black Forest (BF) were tested for in vitro antimicrobial activities and evaluated against selected pathogenic bacterial strains. Three Gram-positive bacteria, being *S. aureus* ATCC 29213, *E. faecalis* ATCC 29212 and MRSA ATCC 43300 and three Gram-negative bacteria including *E. coli* ATCC 25922, *K. pneumonia* ATCC 700603 and *P. aeruginosa* ATCC 27853 were used. Natural forms of honey were used for testing their potential antimicrobial activity. The data revealed that TH, (ZH), MH with different UMF +20, +16, +5 honey types have significant antimicrobial potentialities against microbial strains. BF honey has no significant antimicrobial potentialities as microbial strains were found to be resistant to this type of honey. The microbial strains were significantly inhibited as measured in terms of their zone of inhibition (ZOI), and a large ZOI reflected a high sensitivity of tested microbial strains. Gram-positive (G+) bacteria were found to be more sensitive to all tested honey types except (BF) with significantly higher ZOI values than those of Gram-positive (G-) bacteria as stated in Table 2.

**Manuka honey**

MA 20+ was found to be the most effective type of MH probably due to the concentration of MGO. It was effective against the most tested strain such as MRSA, *S. aureus* and *E. faecalis* showing 25 mm ZOI, whereas the least ZOI was *P. aeruginosa* showing 14 mm ZOI (Figure 1). On the other hand, MA +16 showed slightly smaller ZOI, being MRSA as 21 mm, *S. aureus* showing 21.6 mm and *E. faecalis* showed 19.3 mm ZOI. *P. aeruginosa* had 12 mm ZOI (Figure 2).

MA +5 was found to be the least effective Manuka honey type. It was very effective against MRSA, being 22 mm followed by *S. aureus* with 20.6 mm ZOI. ZOI of *P. aeruginosa* was the least showing only 13.6 mm (Figure 3).

The inhibition zones due to TH were found to be quite similar to the MH results compared to others honey types. MRSA was the most effected bacteria showing 20.6 mm ZOI followed by *S. aureus* showing 20.3 mm ZOI. TH was also found to be the most effective honey type on *P. aeruginosa* which showed 15.6 mm ZOI. The least ZOI was determined in *K. pneumonia*, being only 14.3 mm (Figure 4).
Table 2: ZOI for all tested strain. The values were found to be statistically significant (p <0.05).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Microbial strain</th>
<th>MA20+</th>
<th>MA16+</th>
<th>MA5+</th>
<th>T.H</th>
<th>Z.H</th>
<th>B.F</th>
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<td>22</td>
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<td>20.6</td>
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<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. faecalis (B)</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. faecalis (A)</td>
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<td>17.6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
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</table>

DISCUSSION

All types of tested honey except BF honey displayed substantial antimicrobial activities against tested pathogenic bacterial strains. These primary findings may strengthen the idea that honeys can be used as potential alternative broad-spectrum strategy to treat bacterial infections. Many published studies determined the antimicrobial effects of various types of honeys, however, more extensive researches are necessary for conclusive declaration as substituting broad-spectrum antimicrobial drugs with different type’s honey.

Zahoor honey

The least effective honey type on the tested strains was ZH. MRSA and E. faecalis were found to be the most sensitive strains showing 15.6 mm, while K. pneumonia only showing 12.6 mm ZOI (Figure 5).

BF honey was found to be the least effective type among the tested honeys. Only small ZOI was found in K. pneumonia (12.3 mm) and S. aureus (12.3 mm) (Figure 6).
Figure 3: Antimicrobial activities of Manuka 5+ honey against tested bacterial strains. The largest two of ZOI S. aureus and MRSA. Were the least one P. aeruginosa.

Figure 4: Antimicrobial activities of Talah honey against tested bacterial strains.

Figure 5: Antimicrobial activities of Zahoor honey against tested bacterial strains. The largest three of ZOI E. faecalis (B) &MRSA. Were the least one K. pneumonia.
**Figure 6**: Antimicrobial activities of black forest honey against tested bacterial strains.
This study showed that all types of Manuka honey have strong antibacterial activities against all tested bacteria except *P. aeruginosa*. The most effected bacteria were *S. aureus*, MRSA, *E. coli* and *E. faecalis*. MH also showed smaller ZOI against *K. pneumoniae* and *P. aeruginosa*. This study is contradictory with other studies which showed that Manuka +20, Manuka +16 and Manuka +10 were found to have strong antibacterial activities against both sensitive and resistant *P. aeruginosa*. Another study showed that Manuka honey of lower UMF grade demonstrated equal to significantly increased antimicrobial activity compared to higher UMF grade honey for all tested organism. 

Unlike to MH, Talha and Zahoor honey types showed strong antibacterial activities against *P. aeruginosa* and some of other gram+ and gram- bacteria. On the other hand, black forest honey showed the least inhibition (smallest ZOI). A very recent study demonstrated that Talha honey showed higher antimicrobial activities against *P. aeruginosa* ATCC 27853 and least against *E. coli* ATCC 25922. This study was also found that black forest honey has the least inhibition zone (smallest ZOI). All recorded diameters of inhibition zones in the present study were greater than 11 mm except BF. This result well aligns with the declaration of Agbagwa and Frank-Peterside (2010) that “the diameter of inhibition zones less than 7 mm corresponds to resistant microorganisms and greater than 11 mm suggests that the microorganisms are sensitive to antimicrobial agent.” Therefore, our findings are consistent in that all tested microbial strains were sensitive to tested honeys, and these honeys might be proposed as prospective antimicrobial agents to benefit human health.

### Physiochemical properties of honey

The high viscosity of honey was previously found to provide the barrier in order to protect against bacterial infection into the host. Moreover, high sugar content of honey might affect the osmolarity which may lead to inhibit the microbial growth. Antibacterial activities of manuka honey (Leptospermum scoparium) against *S. aureus*, MRSA, and *Pseudomonas* spp. were demonstrated. These activities of honey were suggested to be depend on various factors that function either singularly or synergistically. The honey is well known to consists of hydrogen peroxide, phenolic compounds, lower pH, osmotic pressure, and other phytochemical content. Furthermore, honey has the ability to generate hydrogen peroxide related antimicrobial activity. The production of hydrogen peroxide by transforming glucose substrate
CONCLUSION

All tested honey types except black forest, have exhibited antimicrobial activities on both gram-positive and gram-negative bacteria, especially S. aureus and MRSA. Manuka +20 and +16 were found to be more effective against all tested strain than other types, while black forest honey has no effectiveness. UMF was found to be depend on MGO.

This study suggests that antimicrobial potential of honey types might be helpful in order to treat the pathogenic microorganisms threatening the public health and changing antibiotics into last-resort drugs. Further studies are required using different honey types on different bacterial strain in order to determine the exact composition of honey tested.

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About Authors

- Ahmad Almatroudi is working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Medical Laboratories, College of Applied Medical Sciences, Qassim University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. His research interests include measurement of the therapeutic potential of natural compounds in the management of diseases, Public health and Microbiology. Ahmad Almatroudi is currently chairman of Department of Medical Laboratories. He has published several meaningful research and review article, of international repute journal and has presented his papers in many national and international conferences.

- Dr. Amjad Ali Khan is currently working as Assistant Professor (since Oct. 2008) in Department of Basic Health Sciences, College of Applied Medical Science, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. He got his Ph.D. in Biochemistry (2005) from AMU, India. In 2007 he joined as Postdoctoral Fellow in University of Minnesota, USA. Besides the academic activities at CAMS-QU, he is engaged in research work and is working as Co-Investigator on four different Interdisciplinary research projects. The major research areas are investigating the therapeutic potential of different medicinal plant extracts and purified compounds on diabetes and induced lung and liver cancers in animal models.
• Arshad Husain Rahmani: is working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Medical Laboratories, College of Applied Medical Sciences, Qassim University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. His research interests include measurement of the therapeutic potential of natural compounds in the management of diseases and expression pattern of the genes linked to cancer development and progression. He has published more than 85 research and review article, of international repute journal. Besides this, he is an active reviewer of several ISI indexed journals.

• Faris Alrumaihi: is as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Medical Laboratories and Vice Dean of College of Applied Medical Science for academic affairs, Qassim University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. His research interests include evaluation of the therapeutic potential of natural compounds in diseases management and expression pattern of genes linked to cancer development and progression. He has published several meaningful research papers in international repute journal and has presented his papers in many national and international conferences.

• Dr. Khaled S. Allemailem: is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Medical Laboratories, College of Applied Medical Science (CAMS), Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. He got his PhD & Master degrees from RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. His research interests include measurement of the therapeutic potential of natural compounds in the management of diseases, and Environmental & Medical Microbiology. He has published several meaningful research papers in international repute journal and has presented his works in many national and international conferences.

• Dr. Lujain Aljaghwni: graduated as a bachelor student from the Department of Medicine and Surgery, College of Medicine, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. She is now an Obstetric and gynecology resident doctor at the Maternity and Children Hospital in Buraydah, Qassim, Saudi Arabia. She has participated in many University activities including community services activities. She also obtained certificates in many courses after graduation. Lujain participated in the 11th Medical Research symposium at Qassim University’s Clinics on 5th December 2017 as a poster presentation.

• Mr. Mohammad Aljaghwni: graduated as a bachelor student from the Department of Medical Radiology, College of Applied Medical Sciences, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. He is now a cardiovascular and catheter specialist at prince sultan center for cardiac medicine and surgery in Buraydah, Qassim, Saudi Arabia. He has participated in many University activities including community services activities. He also obtained certificates in many courses after graduation.

• Mr. Rejo Jacob Joseph is a lecturer in the College of Applied Medical Sciences, Qassim University, KSA, where he has been a faculty member since 2010. Rejo Completed his post-graduate in Medical Laboratory from Sri-Ramachandra University and his bachelor’s degree at Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences, India. Rejo is the practical instructor for Clinical Microbiology subjects on graduate students in the University. His research interest lies in the area of Clinical Microbiology, Antimicrobials, Histotechnology & Clinical Pathology. He has collaborated actively with researchers at Qassim University.

• Miss Aseel Aljaghwni: recently graduated as a bachelor student from the Department of Medical Laboratories, College of Applied Medical Sciences, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. She is now an internship student at the Maternity and Children Hospital in Buraydah, Qassim, Saudi Arabia. She has participated in many University activities including community services activities. She also obtained certificates in many courses after graduation. Aseel participated in MedLab Asia conference 2020 in Thailand as a poster presentation.