

THE COMBINATORIAL EFFECT OF *Azadirachta indica* (NEEM) PLANT WITH  
AMIKACIN AND TETRACYCLINE AGAINST CLINICALLY IMPORTANT  
BACTERIA

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THIS DISSERTATION IS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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I hereby declare that the work in this dissertation is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged, and completed under the supervision of Ms. Lalita Ambigai Sivasamugham.

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## ABSTRACT

Emergence and rapid spread of antibiotic resistance is due to the overuse and incorrect prescription of antibiotics. Antibiotic resistance has brought negative impacts such as difficulty in treating common infections, increase in mortality rate and prolonged suffering. Current treatments to treat diseases caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria have become increasingly limited. Therefore, alternative approaches such as the use of plant extracts and combined therapy have been studied to improve the effectiveness of treatment. Plant extracts such as *Azadirachta indica* (neem) has shown promising use as an antimicrobial agent because it produces various secondary metabolites such as alkaloids and flavonoids. In this study, the combinatorial effect of neem leaf extracts and antibiotics against clinically important pathogens was investigated. The checkerboard assay was carried out to determine the minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) of the neem leaf extract and amikacin as well as tetracycline. However, no MIC could be determined due to the technical error of the microplate reader. Agar well and disc diffusion assay was performed to study the combinatorial effect of neem leaf extract and amikacin as well as tetracycline. An antagonistic effect was observed when *Bacillus subtilis* was exposed to the neem leaf extract and amikacin as a significant reduction ( $p < 0.05$ ) of zone of inhibition from the neem leaf extract and amikacin combination was observed compared to that of amikacin alone. The combined effect of neem leaf extract and amikacin showed no synergistic effect against *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Staphylococcus epidermidis*, *Streptococcus pneumoniae* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* as the diameter of zone of inhibition obtained was the same as that of amikacin alone. No zone of inhibition was observed with *Serratia marcescens* when tested with neem leaf extract and amikacin combination. On the other hand, synergism between neem leaf extract and tetracycline against *Propionibacterium acnes*, *Bacillus subtilis* and *Streptococcus pneumoniae* were obtained which showed significant enlargement ( $p < 0.05$ ) of zone of inhibition as compared to that of tetracycline alone. The combinatorial effect of neem leaf extract and tetracycline showed indifference against *Streptococcus faecalis*, *Staphylococcus epidermidis*, *Enterococcus faecalis* and *Staphylococcus aureus* compared to that of neem leaf extract alone and tetracycline alone. No zone of inhibition was observed with *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and *Serratia marcescens* when tested with neem leaf extract and tetracycline combination. In conclusion, neem leaf extract showed a better combinatorial effect with tetracycline compared to

amikacin due to the synergistic action between neem leaf extract and tetracycline. Antagonism between neem leaf extract and amikacin suggests that combining these agents will reduce the efficacy of amikacin.

## TABLE OF CONTENT

	Page
<b>NON-PLAGIARISM DECLARATION</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>DECLARATION</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENT</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATION</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>CHAPTER</b>	
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1 Antibiotic Resistance	3
2.2 Plant Extracts as Antimicrobial Agents	5
2.2.1 <i>Azadirachta indica</i> (Neem) Extract	7
2.2.1.1 Brief History	7
2.2.1.2 Antimicrobial Activity	7
2.3 Evaluation of Antimicrobial Activity	8
2.3.1 Agar Well Diffusion Method	8
2.3.2 Disk Diffusion Method	9
2.3.3 Broth Microdilution Method	10
2.4 Synergistic Effect of Plant Extracts and Antibiotics	11
<b>3 MATERIALS AND METHODS</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 Media preparation	13
3.2 Confirmatory Tests	13
3.2.1 Preparation of Bacterial Inocula	13
3.2.2 Gram Staining	14
3.2.3 Identification and Confirmation of Gram-positive bacteria	14
3.1.3.1 Catalase Test	14
3.1.3.2 Growth on Mannitol Salt Agar	14
3.2.4 Identification and Confirmation of Gram-negative baacteria	15
3.2.4.1 IMViC Test	15
3.2.4.2 Oxidase Test	16
3.2.4.3 Triple Sugar Iron Test	16
3.3 Ethanolic Neem Leaf Extract Preparation	16

3.4	Checkerboard Assay	17
3.5	Agar Well Diffusion Assay	18
3.6	Disk Diffusion Assay	19
3.7	Statistical Analysis	19
<b>4</b>	<b>RESULTS</b>	<b>20</b>
4.1	Confirmatory Tests	20
4.1.1	Gram Reaction	20
4.1.2	Catalase Test	21
4.1.3	Growth on Mannitol Salt Agar	21
4.1.4	IMViC Test	22
4.1.4.1	Indole Test	22
4.1.4.2	Methyl-red Test	23
4.1.4.3	Voges-Proskauer Test	23
4.1.4.4	Citrate Test	24
4.1.5	Oxidase Test	24
4.1.6	Triple Sugar Iron Test	25
4.2	Checkerboard Assay	26
4.3	Agar Well and Disk Diffusion Assay	27
4.3.1	The Combinatorial effect of <i>Azadirachta indica</i> (Neem) Leaves Extract and Amikacin against the Tested Bacteria	27
4.3.2	The Combinatorial effect of <i>Azadirachta indica</i> (Neem) Leaves Extract and Tetracycline against the Tested Bacteria	29
<b>5</b>	<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<b>32</b>
5.1	Confirmatory Tests	32
5.1.1	Gram Reaction	32
5.1.2	Catalase Test	33
5.1.3	Growth on Mannitol Salt Agar	33
5.1.4	IMViC Test	33
5.1.4.1	Indole Test	33
5.1.4.2	Methyl-red Test	34
5.1.4.3	Voges-Proskauer Test	34
5.1.4.4	Citrate Test	34
5.1.5	Oxidase Test	34
5.1.6	Triple Sugar Iron Test	35
5.2	Checkerboard Assay	36
5.3	Agar Well and Disk Diffusion Assay	36
5.3.1	The Combinatorial effect of <i>Azadirachta indica</i> (Neem) Leaves Extract and Amikacin against the Tested Bacteria	37
5.3.2	The Combinatorial effect of <i>Azadirachta indica</i> (Neem) Leaves Extract and Tetracycline against the Tested Bacteria	38
<b>6</b>	<b>CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>41</b>
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>43</b>
	<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>53</b>



## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Tables</b>		<b>Page</b>
1	Example of plants that have been widely used as traditional medicine	5
2	Type of plant extracts showed promising antimicrobial activity in recent studies	6
3	Medicinal values of neem plant	7
4	Type of plant extracts used to study the synergistic effect combine with standard antibiotics in previous studies	11
5	Pure cultures of Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria	12
6	Procedures and reagents required to carry out each IMViC test	14
7	Identification and classification of 9 strains of bacteria after Gram staining	18

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figures		Page
1	Mortality attributable to antimicrobial resistance as compared to other major causes of death	3
2	(A) Sun-dried neem leaf and (B) Neem leaf powder soaked with 80% (v/v) ethanol and incubated in an orbital shaker	16
3	The Gram-positive diplococci of (A) <i>E. faecalis</i> , Gram-positive clusters of (B) <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i> and the Gram-negative rods of (C) <i>S. marcescens</i>	19
4	(A) Catalase positive ( <i>S. aureus</i> ) and (B) catalase negative ( <i>E. faecalis</i> )	19
5	(A) The yellow colonies and media surrounding the growth of <i>S. aureus</i> while (B) pink colonies and media surrounding <i>S. epidermidis</i> when grown on MSA	20
6	(A) Indole positive ( <i>E. coli</i> ) and (B) indole negative ( <i>P. aeruginosa</i> )	20
7	(A) Methyl red positive ( <i>E. coli</i> ) and (B) methyl red negative ( <i>P. aeruginosa</i> )	21
8	(A) VP Positive ( <i>S. marcescens</i> ) and (B) VP negative ( <i>E. coli</i> )	21
9	(A) Citrate negative ( <i>E. coli</i> ) and (B) citrate positive ( <i>P. aeruginosa</i> )	22
10	(A) oxidase negative ( <i>S. faecalis</i> ) and (B) oxidase positive ( <i>P. aeruginosa</i> )	22
11	(A) <i>P. mirabilis</i> and (B) <i>P. vulgaris</i> showed the production of H <sub>2</sub> S; (C) <i>K. pneumoniae</i> showed fermentation of glucose; and (D) <i>S. marcescens</i> showed fermentation of sucrose, lactose and glucose	23
12	Checkerboard assay for neem leaf extract and amikacin combination against <i>S. aureus</i>	24
13	Agar well diffusion of (A) <i>S. pneumoniae</i> that showed indifference; (B) <i>B. subtilis</i> that showed antagonism	26
14	The mean diameter of zone of inhibition (mm) produced by neem leaf extract, amikacin and combination of neem leaf extract and amikacin against bacterial tested	27

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figures		Page
15	Modified agar well diffusion of (A) <i>P. acnes</i> , (B) <i>B. subtilis</i> and (C) <i>S. pneumoniae</i> that showed synergism between neem leaf extract and tetracycline	28
16	The mean diameter of zone of inhibition (mm) produced by neem leaf extract, tetracycline and combination of neem leaf extract and tetracycline against tested bacteria	29

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CO <sub>2</sub>	carbon dioxide
CFU/mL	colony forming unit per millilitre
°C	degree Celsius
g	gram
h	hour
H <sub>2</sub> O <sub>2</sub>	hydrogen peroxide
H <sub>2</sub> S	hydrogen sulfide
μL	microlitre
mL	millilitre
mm	millimeter
min	minute
%	percent
pH	power of hydrogen
KOH	potassium hydroxide
rpm	revolutions per minute
s	second
v/v	volume per volume

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Antibiotic resistance is an emerging threat and a global concern to public health (WHO, 2016a). The development of antibiotic resistance is aggravated by the overuse and inappropriate use of antibiotics leading to the increase in mortality due to infections caused by antibiotic resistant bacteria (FAO, 2016). The emergence and spread of resistance mechanisms such as horizontal transfer of resistance through *mcr1*-gene has been discovered by Chan (2016). This horizontal transfer of resistance encourages the rapid transfer of antibiotic resistance genes among bacteria and thus, increases the difficulty in treating the diseases caused by antibiotic resistant bacteria (WHO, 2016a).

The increase of antibiotic resistance to a dangerously high level urges the need to discover and develop alternative antimicrobial agents from other potential sources such as plants. The use of plants for medicinal purposes has been recorded in ancient Egyptian and Chinese history as early as 3,000 B.C (University of Virginia, 2007). Studies show that estimated up to 80% of people worldwide use plants for primary health care (Ehrlich, 2015). Medicinal plants such as *Allium sativum* (garlic) and *Prosopis juliflora* (mesquite) contain phytoconstituents such as alkenyl phenols, alkaloids and flavonoids which possess antimicrobial properties (Emad, 2011). Plant extracts have additional benefits as they are low in toxicity. In addition, the cost of production as an alternative antimicrobial agent is also low (Teka et al., 2015).

*Azadirachta indica* from the family *Meliaceae*, commonly known as neem, is used as traditional medicine due to its antimicrobial and other medicinal properties. Studies have shown that different parts of neem plants exhibit antimicrobial activities (Raja Ratna Reddy et al., 2013). The synergistic effect of neem extracts with other medicinal plants and antibiotics against several clinically important bacteria have been carried out to further study the therapeutic properties and effects of neem extracts. Neem leaf extracts with other medicinal plants such as Aloe Vera and curry leaf extracts as well as antibiotics have shown synergistic effect against clinically important bacteria such as *Bacillus subtilis* (Rasha, Hatil, & Aisha, 2015). The synergistic effect helps to improve the efficacy of antimicrobial

activity, reduce toxicity and reduce the development of antibiotic resistance in bacteria. Therefore, it is crucial to study the synergistic effect of neem extracts with antibiotics as it can enhance the antimicrobial activity of antibiotic for therapeutic purposes. Previous study done by Kushalini (2016) revealed that neem leaf extract inhibited the growth of several clinically-important bacteria such as *Streptococcus faecalis*, *Enterococcus faecalis*, *Propionibacterium acnes*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Staphylococcus epidermidis*, *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, *Bacillus subtilis*, *Serratia marcescens* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*.

Thus, this study was aimed to analyze the combinatorial effect of *Azadirachta indica* (neem) leaf extract with amikacin and tetracycline against nine strains of clinically important bacteria as stated by Kushalini using the checkerboard assay and the agar well and disc diffusion assay.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE

Antibiotics are antimicrobial drugs which are commonly used to prevent and treat bacterial infections in both animals and humans (CDC, 2015). The ability of bacteria to adapt and survive from the antimicrobial effect has led to the emergence of antibiotic resistance (APUA, 2014). Antibiotic resistance is one of the most vital public health concern worldwide as the rapid emergence and spread of antibiotic resistance has threatened the use of antibiotic to treat common infections (WHO, 2016a).

According to the Review on Antimicrobial Resistance, approximately 700,000 people die from infectious disease caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria every year (O'Neill, 2016) and 200,000 people die from diseases caused by multidrug-resistant bacteria such as drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB) (WHO, 2017). About 60,000 deaths of newborns have been reported due to antibiotic-resistant neonatal infections in India in 2013 (Laxminarayan et al., 2013). It is estimated that death attributed to antibiotic resistance may increase up to 10 million people by the year of 2050 as shown in Figure 1 (O'Neill, 2016).

