Prevalence of R-type ACSSuT in strains of *Salmonella* serovar Typhimurium DT193 isolated from human infections in Brazil

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**Objective.** To determine the prevalence of resistance to ampicillin, chloramphenicol, streptomycin, sulphonamides, and tetracyclines (ACSSuT) in *Salmonella* serovar Typhimurium definitive [phage] type (DT) 193 strains isolated from human sources over the last four decades.

**Methods.** From 2008 to 2010, 553 DT193 isolates out of 810 human-origin *Salmonella* ser. Typhimurium phage-typed strains isolated from the 1970s through 2008 were selected and tested for ACSSuT resistance: 91 strains isolated during the 1970s, 65 from the 1980s, 70 from the 1990s, and 327 from 2000–2008. Resistance profiles were determined using the disk diffusion method.

**Results.** An antimicrobial susceptibility assay indicated 20.9%, or 116, of all isolates tested were ACSSuT-resistant, 52.0% (287) were resistant to one or more drugs in the ACSSuT profile, and 27.1% (150) were nonresistant (susceptible to antimicrobials). Based on the assay, overall antimicrobial resistance was extremely high in the 1970s (affecting 99.0% of isolates from that period) and remained high during the 1980s, when 95.4% of isolates had some type of antimicrobial resistance and incidence of *Salmonella* ser. Typhimurium DT193 R-type ACSSuT increased to 73.8%. R-type ACSSuT dropped to 27.1% (19 isolates) during the 1990s, and to 5.2% (17) during 2000–2008, despite a substantial increase in the number of isolates tested (397 versus 204, 111, and 98, respectively, for the previous three decades).

**Conclusions.** Although prevalence of *Salmonella* ser. Typhimurium DT193 R-type ACSSuT in Brazil has decreased since the 1970s, ACSSuT resistance markers continue to circulate. Therefore, continuous surveillance should be conducted to evaluate the occurrence of *Salmonella* ser. Typhimurium DT193 and its antimicrobial resistance.

**Key words** *Salmonella* infections; *Salmonella* Typhimurium; drug resistance, multiple, bacterial; Brazil.

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The *Salmonella* genus comprises more than 2,500 serotypes—most of which are considered potential human pathogens—but only a relatively small number of serovars have been associated with human infections (1). Among these, *Salmonella* serovar Typhimurium is ubiquitous, usually inducing gastroenteritis in a broad range of unrelated host species, and is one of the major serotypes causing infections in humans worldwide (1, 2), including Brazil (3).

For the purposes of epidemiological studies, phage typing of *Salmonella* can be used to subcategorize the more common *S. enterica* serotypes. It can also be
used to determine similarities and differences among isolates collected from different provenances over different time periods based on their reactions to specific sets of phages.

This study used the typing scheme described by Anderson et al. (4) in which 37 bacteriophages are used to identify more than 200 lysotypes, some of which show antimicrobial multiresistance. The importance of this technique was revealed in the characterization of a clone diffused widely worldwide: Salmonella ser. Typhimurium definitive type (DT) 104, the phage-type carrier of gene cassettes that demonstrates the basic resistance model (R) to ampicillin (A), chloramphenicol (C), streptomycin (S), sulphonamides (Su), and tetracyclines (T)—the profile ACSSuT—as well as trimethoprim, in some cases, and quinolones (more rarely) (5).

Salmonella ser. Typhimurium DT104 was first isolated in cattle in the United Kingdom in the 1990s and subsequently found in other countries, infecting diverse animal species, including humans. Since then, this phage type has been identified with relative frequency in the United States and Europe (2, 6–8).

Another phage type of epidemiological importance, due to its multiresistant character, is Salmonella ser. Typhimurium DT193. Studies have demonstrated that the acquisition of plasmids or temperate bacteriophages by several unrelated phages types of Salmonella ser. Typhimurium can result in their conversion to DT193 (9). From the 1970s to the present, this phage type has been one of the most prevalent in Brazil and around the world (3, 10).

In Brazil, the correlation between DT104 and the ACSSuT resistance profile seems to have limited epidemiological relevance, as it was once isolated in patients hospitalized in São Paulo (3). Nevertheless, DT193 belongs to the so-called DT104 complex, which includes other closely related phage types (11), and is of importance because it shows the ACSSuT profile and is the prevalent phage type in strains isolated from human infection (3).

Considering the importance of DT193 in Brazil, this study aimed to describe the prevalence of ACSSuT resistance among Salmonella ser. Typhimurium DT193 strains isolated from human sources during the last four decades.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### Bacterial strains

From 2008 to 2010, 553 DT193 isolates were isolated of 810 Salmonella ser. Typhimurium phage-typed strains isolated from human infections from the 1970s through 2008 were selected and tested for ACSSuT resistance. The selection of isolates was based on information from the Enterobacteria Laboratory databank of the Oswaldo Cruz Institute (FIOCRUZ) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Distribution of the isolates by decade of origin is shown in Table 1. Strains from the 1970s were isolated from a unique outbreak, whereas strains collected from 1980 through 2008 were isolated from sporadic cases. Once selected, the cultures were re-isolated and characterized through biochemical and antigenic analyses using methods described by Ewing (12) and Grimont and Weill (13). Rough cultures were excluded from the study.

Antigenic confirmation (including an induction/absorption phase, when necessary) and slide agglutination serotyping (based on the Kauffmann-White scheme) were carried out for all isolates selected for the study. Strains were defined as Salmonella enterica ser. Typhimurium based on serology positive for the second flagellar phase (5, 4, 12).

#### Phage typing

Strains isolated from 1970 through 1998 were phage typed by the United Kingdom’s Health Protection Agency (HPA) International Reference Laboratory for Enteric Phage Typing, whereas strains isolated during and after 1999 were characterized by the FIOCRUZ Enterobacteria Laboratory, using phage preparations supplied by the HPA, and following the technical procedures reported by Anderson et al. (4) and the criteria for interpretation of phage reactions described by Willshaw et al. (14).

#### Antimicrobial susceptibility

Antimicrobial susceptibility was tested using the standard disk diffusion method, according to the protocol of the Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute (Wayne, PA, USA) (15). Strains were tested against the following antimicrobial agents (Oxoid Limited, Hampshire, England): ampicillin (10 µg), cefepime (30 µg), cefoxitin (30 µg), ceftriaxone (30 µg), cefazidime (30 µg), ciprofloxacin (5 µg), chloramphenicol (30 µg); streptomycin (10 µg); gentamicin (10 µg); sulphonamide (300 µg); and tetracycline (30 µg).

For quality control of the antimicrobial susceptibility test, the following references strains were used: Escherichia coli ATCC 25922, E. coli ATCC 35218, Pseudomonas aeruginosa ATCC 27853, Enterococcus faecalis ATCC 29212, and Staphylococcus aureus ATCC 25923.

#### Statistical analysis

The distribution of all variables, and their frequency, was also studied. Bivariate analyses of the variable categories were carried out using Fisher’s exact test. Bilateral tests were employed in all analyses, using $P < 0.05$ as the level of significance.

## RESULTS

The different types of antimicrobial resistance found among the 553 selected isolates of Salmonella ser. Typhimurium DT193 are shown in Table 2. The most prevalent resistance profile (ACSSuT) was verified in 116 isolates (20.9%), and one or more of its antibiotic resistance...
markers was verified in 287 isolates (52%).

A total of 99% of isolates from the 1970s had some type of antimicrobial resistance (the highest frequency of drug resistance throughout all four decades), and among those, 35.2% were R-type ACSSuT. This may be partly attributed to the fact that all strains collected during this period were isolated from a unique outbreak that occurred in the city of São Paulo.

Overall drug resistance remained high during the 1980s (at 95.4%), and an increase in R-type ACSSuT Salmonella ser. Typhimurium DT193 frequency (to 73.8%) was observed. In addition, the diversity of resistance profiles decreased, as did the prevalence of S and Su resistance markers.

During the 1990s 64.3% of isolated strains were antimicrobial-resistant, a reduction of 31.1% versus the 1980s, and from 2000 to 2008, 63% of the isolates were resistant, a decline of 1.3%. R-type ACSSuT detection declined over time as well, with only 19 isolates (27.1%) presenting this feature during the 1990s, dropping to 17 (5.2%) during the period 2000–2008.

Over the four decades studied, a break point between the prevalence of resistance and susceptibility was noted in the transition from the 1980s to the 1990s. Although the number of Salmonella ser. Typhimurium DT193 isolates has increased in recent years, the percentage of antimicrobial resistance has remained at around 60%.

On the other hand, 150 Salmonella ser. Typhimurium DT193 strains (27.1%) were susceptible to the antimicrobials used in the study (ampicillin, chloramphenicol, streptomycin, sulphonamide, and tetracycline), especially those isolated from 2000 to 2008 (21.9%). None of the isolates was resistant to second or third-generation cephalosporins or fluoroquinolones.

**DISCUSSION**

Antimicrobial resistance that is displayed by enterobacteria, especially in the case of Salmonella serovars, is not something that can be identified as having developed over the last century or something that can be identified as having a causal relationship to the universe of economically more developed countries. In truth, this situation depicts an ecological phenomenon, arising principally from the natural competition among microorganisms in a biocenosis of nutritional elements. While the investigations of Hughes and Datta (16) and Levy (17) that analyzed, respectively, human enterobacteria isolates from 1920 and those from African wild animals that had never received antibiotics (and were therefore free from the influence of selective anthropogenetic pressure) found low resistance to the antimicrobials, they did detect the presence of plasmids that transmit resistance factors.

As some of the most important zoonotic agents to date, Salmonella isolates from animals have developed antimicrobial resistance very rapidly, mainly because of the selective pressure that has arisen from the use of antimicrobials as animal food supplements. These sources of infection and their products (which are often utilized in human foodstuffs) have established propagation hubs, which account for the prevalence of certain Salmonella serovars in human infections, and their display of cosmopolitan and nosocomial characteristics (18). This entire evolutionary process is encountered and supported scientifically by the genetic trials of Datta (19) on a resistant strain of Salmonella ser. Typhimurium that has the capability of transferring its genetic resistance markers (9, 20).

In a pioneering study, Anderson (21) associated antimicrobial resistance to an established phage type of Salmonella ser. Typhimurium (DT29) with human enteric outbreaks, and determined that the primary source of the infection was bovine. In the 1970s, various outbreaks of Salmonella erupted in the United Kingdom and Europe, provoked by DT193, DT204, and DT204c, which had bovines as reservoirs (22). These phage types had their origins in DT49, and the great majority of them exhibited R-type ACKSSuT (resistance to ampicillin, chloramphenicol, neomycin-kanamycin, streptomycin, sulphonamides, and tetracyclines) (14). At present, DT104 is the dominant phage type in Europe, presenting R-type ACSSuT (23, 24).

Curiously, DT104, DT204, and DT204c, which exhibit multidrug resistance and are found in many parts of the world (9, 11, 25, 26), have not been recorded in Brazil (3, 10, 27), where prevalence of the multidrug-resistant Salmonella ser. Typhimurium is related to DT193, as first reported by Magalhães and Véras (28) in cases of infant enteritis in Recife (Northeast Brazil) in 1970.

During the 1970s, Salmonella ser. Typhimurium was prevalent in southern Brazil, especially in state hospitals. Its
rapid and continued dissemination throughout the decade could be seen as evidence of the difficulties experienced in controlling these outbreaks. During this decade, in the city of São Paulo, Salmonella ser. Typhimurium was the most prevalent Salmonella serovar, representing >78% of all cases isolated by the central public health laboratory from diarrheal disease in the community and from nosocomial sources.

Ten years later, a new serovar without the second-phase H antigen was encountered in a chicken carcass that had been recovered in Portugal. Several years later, in 1997, it was isolated in Spain and its frequency subsequently increased rapidly. Initially, multidrug-resistant isolates with this antigenic formula were classified as DT U302 (often associated with pigs and pork products), which became the fourth most common Salmonella serovar identified between 1998 and 2000. Researchers realized that monophasic Salmonella isolates could have originated from ancestral forms that had not acquired a second-phase flagellar antigen or developed the switching that had not acquired a second-phase flagellar antigen or developed the switch- that had not acquired a second-phase flagellar antigen or developed the switching mechanism during their evolution. This serovaccine formula has therefore been referred to as a variant of Salmonella ser. Typhimurium or Salmonella ser. Lagos (23). 

Macro-restriction profiles obtained by pulsed-field gel electrophoresis (Pulsed Field Gel Electrophoresis) led Zamperini et al. (29) to conclude that monophasic Salmonella 4,[5],12:i:- isolates were genotypically Salmonella ser. Typhimurium. Tavechio et al. (30) observed that Salmonella ser. Typhimurium and Salmonella 1,[4],5,[12]:i:- isolated in Brazil were distributed in highly similar PFGE clusters, also suggesting a close relationship at the serotype level. Since 2006, R-type ASSuT (resistance to ampicillin, streptomycin, sulphonamides, and tetracyclines) monophasic Salmonella 4,[5],12:i:- DT193 has also been observed in outbreaks and single cases in Europe (23). In the current study, monophasic Salmonella 4,[5],12:i:- was not detected, and all isolates were characterized as Salmonella ser. Typhimurium. However, DT193 resistance to ACSSuT was confirmed. Indeed, the first isolation of Salmonella ser. Typhimurium DT193 R-type ACKSSuT in Brazil was identified in 1970 (28). In that study, ASSu determinants were preferentially transferred over CKT determinants to E. coli K12, suggesting ASSu could be encoded by a conjugative plasmid. The authors concluded that resistance to tetracycline (R-type T) was segregated from ASSu and that it may have spontaneously evolved from another plasmid originating in strains of DT193 R-type ASSuT. Hampton et al. (31) results showed that DT193 can be rapidly subdivided by antibiogram for epidemiological investigations, and that further subdivision can be achieved by molecular techniques.

The evaluation of the antimicrobial resistance profiles observed in this study is in agreement with the findings of Malhães and Véras (28), since ASSu was detected in 61 isolates (67.8%). The detection of multidrug-resistant isolates with marker Su, present since the 1970s, shows that the R-type has expanded in response to salmonellosis treatment schemes.

For years, ampicillin, trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole, and chloramphenicol were the drugs of choice for treating severe salmonellosa infections, but the increasing rates of resistance to these agents has decreased efficacy (32). Therefore, fluoroquinolones and extended-spectrum cephalosporins have become the usual therapies used in these cases (33, 34).

The significant decrease in R-type ACSSuT in the 1990s versus the 1980s shown in the current results may be attributed to changes in drugs of choice for salmonellosis treatment. According to Asensi and Hofer (35), second- and third-generation cephalosporins were used in human therapy in Brazil beginning in the 1990s due to the ineffectiveness of ampicillin, chloramphenicol, and trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole.

The persistence of significant resistance to ampicillin in strains isolated during the 2000–2008 period was probably due to the drug’s widespread use both within and outside of hospitals in fighting numerous bacterial infections, a practice that favors the selection of bacteria that produce β-lactamases. The antibiotic resistance to β-lactam of Salmonella ser. Typhimurium DT193, including multidrug resistance, has been observed in Brazil by Asensi et al. (27). This occurs in Salmonella spp. carriers of β-lactamase types TEM, SHV, and PSE (36, 37), forcing the use of second- or third-generation antimicrobials, which are always more expensive and often more toxic than their predecessors (38). This change in antibiotic therapy for invasive salmonellosis explains the emergence of β-lactamase-producing Salmonella spp. and how it may contribute to the maintenance of ampicillin resistance.

According to the current study results, only 150 (27.1%) of the 553 selected isolates were susceptible to antimicrobials (Table 2), and 116 (20.9%) were R-type ACSSuT. The prevalence of multidrug resistance observed in this study is consistent with the results of national studies, which also focused on human isolates (3, 27, 28). Other Brazilian authors had previously revealed that multidrug resistance was higher in human versus nonhuman Salmonella ser. Typhimurium, supporting the idea that the dissemination of human-origin strains might be attributed to a human reservoir and that antimicrobial use by humans had resulted in an increase in multidrug resistance (3, 10).

Further evidence may be seen in the progressive decrease in overall antimicrobial resistance, which dropped from 95.4% among isolates from the 1980s to 64.3% for those from the 1990s and 63% in the period 2000–2008. It is possible that employing more rigorous means of control over the use of antimicrobial agents in all areas of the food chain has had a beneficial effect, as reported by Ghilardi et al. (3) following an examination of a collection of Salmonella ser. Typhimurium isolated from human and nonhuman sources. Evidence of this trend was supported in the current study by the significant predominance (P < 0.01) of the multidrug resistance of phenotype ACSSuT in the period 1970–1980 compared with strains isolated between 2000 and 2008.

This study had several limitations, including the way in which the results were interpreted for strains isolated during the 1970s. While all isolated strains from that decade were from a unique outbreak, the general human population varies, and individuals may have had contact with several different strains, because Salmonella ser. Typhimurium was a common community-acquired and

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5 Since DT193 has been verified as the perennial carrier of antimicrobial susceptibility throughout the four-decade period analyzed, resistance to all five antimicrobials can be inferred even if no second- or third-generation cephalosporin resistance has been observed.
nosocomial infection in Brazil in the 1970s. In addition, no molecular assessment was conducted to determine if all analyzed strains belonged to the same clone or were multiclonal.

In conclusion, this study showed that the prevalence of human isolates of Salmonella ser. Typhimurium DT193 in Brazil has been increasing since the 1990s, whereas detection of R-type ACSSuT has been decreasing. These microorganisms may persist and can transfer these markers of resistance through the environment and the food chain and thus represent a potentially significant public health problem. This study also confirmed that all Salmonella ser. Typhimurium strains analyzed were susceptible to second- and third-generation cephalosporins and fluoroquinolones, which should therefore be considered crucial components of therapy for Salmonella infections in humans. Nevertheless, the factors that influence the propagation of multidrug-resistant strains in Brazil, and how they were introduced in Brazil, remains unknown. It is possible that through the control of antibiotic sales in Brazil, initiated in 2010, a reduction in or at least a slowing of the growth of antibiotic resistance can be achieved. This underscores the need for continuous surveillance to evaluate the occurrence of Salmonella and its antimicrobial resistance in order to avoid a threat to human therapy efficacy.

Acknowledgments. The authors express their appreciation to Cristina Barroso Hofer, for her contribution to the statistical analysis, and to Evaldo Soares, for his technical assistance.

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Manuscript received on 20 August 2010. Revised version accepted for publication on 26 February 2011.