

In Vitro Antifungal Susceptibility of *Candida Albicans* Isolated from Yemeni Patients with Denture Stomatitis

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Abstract

Background and aims: *Candida*-associated denture stomatitis (CADS) is a common fungal infection in people who wear dentures. The main objectives of this study were to identify the causative agents of CADS and *in vitro* antifungal susceptibility testing (AFST) for *Candida albicans* in Yemeni patients with denture stomatitis.

Methods: A total of 88 *Candida* spp. obtained from patients with denture stomatitis. *Candida* spp were identified using standard microbiological methods. The *in-vitro* antifungal susceptibility of *Candida albicans* to fluconazole (FCZ), itraconazole (ICZ), voriconazole (VCZ), and amphotericin B (AMB) was evaluated using the E test strips. Interpretive sensitivity criteria for antifungal breakpoints were adapted from the Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute (CLSI).

Results: Overall, *C. albicans* was the most commonly isolated species ($n = 60$; 68.2%), followed by *C. glabrata* ($n = 9$; 10.2%), *C. tropicalis* ($n = 7$; 8%), and *C. parapsilosis* ($n = 3$; 3.4%). Voriconazole had the lowest geometric mean minimum inhibitory concentration which was 0.0418 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ for MIC50, and 0.957 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ for MIC90; followed by amphotericin B (AMB) in which MIC50 was 0.518 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ and for MIC90 was 1.06 $\mu\text{g/ml}$.

Conclusion: Our study showed that *Candida albicans* was the most prevalent *Candida* species in Yemeni patients with CADS and was susceptible to both azoles and amphotericin B. In addition, voriconazole could be a suitable alternative to antifungal agents currently used in the treatment of CADS, as well as in the treatment of recurrent Candidiasis.

Keywords: *Candida albicans*; *Candida*-associated denture stomatitis (CADS); *in vitro* antifungal susceptibility testing (AFST); Yemen

Introduction

Wearing dentures and inadequate denture hygiene, especially constantly wearing dentures rather than removing them during sleep, is another risk factor for both oral candidiasis and *Candida* carriage. Dentures offer a relatively acidic, moist, and anaerobic environment for the reason that the mucous membrane covered by the dentures is protected from oxygen and saliva, which prevents or limits the growth of germs. Loose and poor-fitting dentures may also cause minor mucosal trauma which is thought to increase mucosal permeability and increase the ability of *C. albicans* to invade tissue. Dentures may therefore become covered with biofilm

and act as reservoirs of infection, resulting in persistent re-infection of the mucosa [1-4]. *Candida*-associated denture stomatitis (CADS) is a chronic atrophic complication of the oral cavity that mainly affects people who wear removable dentures. Some have reported that up to 65% of denture wearers have this condition to some degree. Although this condition is also known as 'denture sore mouth', there is rarely any pain [5]. *Candida* is associated with approximately 90% of denture-related stomatitis cases [6]. Numerous evidence-based studies have revealed that *Candida albicans* is the major causative agent of denture stomatitis (DS), goes along by *Candida tropicalis*, *Candida glabrata*, *Candida parapsilosis*, *Candida krusei*, or other species as *Candida*

stellatoidea, *Candida pseudotropicalis*, *Candida famata*, *Candida rugosa*, *Candida geotrichum*, *Candida dubliniensis*, and *Candida guilliermondii* [1-4, 7-9]. The untimely diagnosis of pathogenic fungal agents and the detection of their susceptibility to antifungal drugs are vital to the treatment of infection and the development of preventive healthcare-associated strategies [1,2,10,11].

Management of CADS is based on a broad-choice treatment strategy [12], which consists of detecting and eradicating potential significant risk factors, avoiding systemic *Candida* infection, and dipping any associated inconveniences. Use of oral preparations of antimicrobial agents, such as amphotericin B (AMB), nystatin (NYS), and miconazole (MIC), and systemic drugs, such as fluconazole (FCZ), voriconazole (VCZ), posaconazole (POS), itraconazole (ICZ), and ketoconazole (KTZ), has been revealed to be efficient in the treatment of CADS [13–16]. Echinocandins, such as caspofungin (CAS), are a class of antifungal drugs that appear to be highly effective against all species of *Candida*, including those that are less sensitive or are resistant to FCZ and/or ICZ [15]. Nevertheless, earlier studies have described recurrence and clinical relapse of CADS after treatment [17, 18]. Obtain sufficient information about the antifungal susceptibility testing (AFST) from *Candida* spp. participation in CADS may aid in the selection of alternative antifungal treatments for recurrent oral candidiasis.

Despite the lack of research on dental problems in Yemen in the past, there is a growing interest in dental problems nowadays as many studies have been conducted in cases of oral bacterial and fungal infections, drug resistance, tooth decay, causes of permanent tooth extraction, chemical drugs and Oral herbal [1-4, 19-33]. In Yemen, there have been several studies discussing biofilm formation, sensitivity to antifungals, and isolation of *Candida* from the oral cavity of denture wearers and free

dentures members, but no study has been found in determining MIC50 and MIC90 antifungal drugs for *Candida albicans* [1-4]. Therefore, in the

current study, we identified the causative agents of CADS and an *in vitro* antifungal susceptibility test (AFST) to determine the MIC in *Candida albicans* and the rate of resistance to 5 selected antifungal drugs among Yemeni patients with CADS.

Materials and Methods

Study site and patient selection

The patients were selected from dental clinics in Al-Thawra Hospital, Al-Jumhuri Hospital, and some private dental centers in Sana'a, Yemen. The inclusion criteria for selecting the subject were healthy individuals with no clinical signs of *Candida* infection and no systemic disease. In addition, individuals who smoked or were currently taking antifungals, steroids, antibiotics, or immunosuppressive drugs in the past six months were excluded.

Sample Collection Process

After examination of the oral cavity, denture samples were obtained by scraping sterile swabs across the inner surface of the denture. In a 6-month period (1st January to end of June 2020), a total of 88 clinical isolates were collected from 79 patients aged 39–76 years with DS. For patients with stomatitis caused by *Candida albicans* (CADS) contained 13 (21.7%) males and 47 (78.3%) females, their ages ranged between 39-74 years (Table 1). All samples were streaked on Sabouraud dextrose agar and incubated at 35°C. for 7 days. All suspected colonies were detected by CHROM Agar *Candida*. *Candida* species were identified by the color of the colonies using the color reference guide provided by the manufacturer. When color determination was unclear, fermentation assay for sucrose, maltose, glucose, lactose-galactose was performed. *Candida* species has also been identified by the ability to produce Chlamydia spores on glutinous rice agar [33].

Characters	Number	Percentage
Sex		
Male	13	21.7
Female	47	78.3
Age groups		
≤40 years	2	3.3
41-50 years	16	26.7
51-60 years	35	58.3
>60 years	7	11.7
Total	60	100
Mean age	53 years	
SD	9.5 years	
Min	39 years	
Max	74 years	

Table 1: The age and sex distribution of patients with *Candida albicans*-associated denture stomatitis (CADS) at a selected dental clinic in the city of Sana'a

Antifungal susceptibility testing

The *in vitro* activity of the antifungal agents against each isolate was determined by E-test (HiMedia, Mumbai, India) according to the manufacturer's instructions. E-test strips for fluconazole (FCZ; 0.016 ~ 256 µg/mL), itraconazole (ICZ; 0.002 ~ 32 µg/mL), voriconazole (VCZ; 0.002 ~ 32 µg/mL), and amphotericin B (AMB; 0.002 ~ 32 µg/mL) were used [34]. Interpretive sensitivity criteria for antifungal breakpoints were adapted from the Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute (CLSI), [35]. The breakpoints used in *C. albicans* are: FCZ (S=2; SDD = 4; R ≥ 8); VCZ (S ≤ 0.12; R ≥ 1), ICZ (S= 0.12; R ≥ 1) and AMB (S =2; R > 2). For quality control, *C. albicans* (ATCC 10231)

was used as a reference strain and tested simultaneously with clinical isolates.

Results

Overall, *C. albicans* was the most commonly isolated species ($n = 60$; 68.2%), followed by *C. glabrata* ($n = 9$; 10.2%), *C. tropicalis* ($n = 7$; 8%), and *C. parapsilosis* ($n = 3$; 3.4%). 78.3% of the participants are females and only 21.7% are males. The age average \pm SD for participants was 53 \pm 9.5 years. Most of the subjects covered were in the age group 51-60 years (58.3%) followed by 41-50 years (26.7%). Table 3 shows, the *In-vitro* antifungal susceptibility of 4 antifungal agents against 60 *Candida albicans* isolated from *Candida*-associated denture stomatitis. Voriconazole had the lowest geometric mean minimum inhibitory

concentration which was 0.0418 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ for MIC₅₀, and 0.957 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ for MIC₉₀; followed by amphotericin B (AMB) in which MIC₅₀ was 0.518 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ and for MIC₉₀ was 1.06 $\mu\text{g/ml}$.

Antifungal drugs	Minimum inhibition concentration (MIC $\mu\text{g/ml}$)			
	MIC range	Geometric MIC ₅₀	Geometric MIC ₉₀	Resistant rate
Amphotericin B (AMB; 0.002 ~ 32 $\mu\text{g/ml}$)	0.025 – 3.0	0.518	1.06	3 (5%)
Fluconazole (FCZ; 0.016 ~ 256 $\mu\text{g/ml}$)	0.35-16	5.56	4.12	11 (18.3%)
Itraconazole (ICZ; 0.002 ~ 32 $\mu\text{g/ml}$),	0.025 – 9	1.273	1.73	9 (15%)
Voriconazole (VCZ; 0.002 ~ 32 $\mu\text{g/ml}$),	0.015-3.0	0.418	0.957	7 (11.7%)

MIC₅₀ = Minimum Inhibitory Concentration required to inhibit the growth of 50% of organisms. MIC₉₀ = Minimum Inhibitory Concentration required to inhibit the growth of 90% of organisms. MIC range is the range of the lowest and highest MIC values obtained from 60 *C. albicans* isolates tested. Percentage resistance is the percentage of isolates resistant to a specific antifungal drug

Table 3: *In vitro* antifungal susceptibility of 4 antifungal agents against 60 *Candida albicans* isolated from *Candida*-associated denture stomatitis.

Discussion

A complete denture (also known as a full denture or plate) is a removable device used when all the teeth inside the jaw are missing and need to be replaced with prosthetics. Unlike a partial denture, a full denture is created when there are no more teeth left in the arch and is therefore an exclusively tissue-reinforced prosthesis. In the current study, the mean age \pm SD of the participants was 53 ± 9.5 years and ranged from 39 to 74 years. This result differs from that reported from Iran where the mean age of DS patients was 65 ± 7.5 years and the patients' ages ranged from 55 to 84 years. The younger age of Yemenis in these findings could be explained by the exposure of Yemeni patients to factors of tooth loss, such as: dental caries, periodontal disease, trauma, congenital disorders (such as *ergogenesis imperfecta*, hypomineralization of molar incisors) and functional impairment more than the Iranian population [36]. Dentures in the oral cavity serve as a reservoir of *Candida spp.* and, thus, it considered a predisposing factor for DS in denture patients, as well as a possible origin for re-infection [37]. In the current study, the dominant *Candida* species isolated from the mouth was *Candida albicans* with 58%. Other species were also isolated from the mouth; *Candida glabrata* from 9 patients (10.2%), *Candida tropicalis* from 7 patients (8%), and *Candida parapsilosis* isolated from 3 patients (3.4%). These results are similar to that reported by Samaranyake *et al.* and Lee *et al.* in which the most frequently identified species is *C. albicans*, although *C. glabrata*, *C. guilliermondii*, *C. parapsilosis*, *C. krusei*, and *C. tropicalis* are less

commonly seen [38,39]. However, Bouquot *et al.* reported that *C. tropicalis* was the most common non-*Candida albicans* *Candida* (NCAC), followed by *C. glabrata*, while *C. parapsilosis* were rare isolated in oral colonization or as a cause of stomatitis [40]. As it is known *Candida* species may be able to metabolize ethanol and convert it into the carcinogen acetaldehyde, and can thus progress oral and upper gastrointestinal tract cancer. This means that our studied individuals under risk of oral and upper gastrointestinal tract cancer. Consequently, , greater emphasis should be placed on diagnosis and treatment of oral *Candida albicans* infections, also on other *Candida* species than *C. albicans* as recommended to prevent this development [41,42]. In agreement with other studies, the current research found that *C. albicans*, *C. parapsilosis*, *C. tropicalis*, and *C. glabrata* caused CADS [1, 2, 43-45] and recommended drugs in CADS patients without an underlying disease commonly includes a NYS suspension or a clotrimazole tablet. However, topical application of anazole, such as Fluconazole (FCZ or Itraconazole (ICZ), can also be used to prevent persistent or chronic fungal infections in the patients [34, 46]. Several studies reported the emergence of antifungal resistance to azoles, which has been associated with multiple episodes of recurrence [16, 47-49]. In the current study, 18.3% of *C. albicans* (11/60) was observed to be resistant to Fluconazole (FCZ). In contrast with the current study data, Abaci and Haliki-Uztan (2011) reported that 59.4% of *C. albicans* were resistant to Fluconazole (FCZ) [50].

<i>Candida</i> species	Number	Percentage
<i>Candida albicans</i>	51	58
<i>Candida glabrata</i>	9	10.2
<i>Candida tropicalis</i>	7	8
<i>Candida parapsilosis</i>	3	3.4
<i>Candida albicans</i> + <i>Candida glabrata</i>	5	5.7
<i>Candida albicans</i> + <i>Candida tropicalis</i>	4	4.5
Total <i>Candida albicans</i>	60	68.2
Total <i>Candida</i> species	88	100

Table 2: Distribution of different types of *Candida* species among *Candida*-associated denture stomatitis (CADS) isolated from 79 patients.

AMB, also used in the management of CADS, proved effective against *Candida spp.* [51]. Besides, the findings obtained in the present study were in agreement with the results of Wingeter *et al.* [52] regarding the susceptibility of oral *Candida* strains to AMB. In the current study, 5% of

C. albicans (3/60) was observed to be resistant to Amphotericin B (AMB) as AMB-resistant *C. albicans* isolates were reported from several previous studies [50,53]. In the current study, 11.7% of *C. albicans* (7/60) was observed to be resistant to Voriconazole (VCZ). However, the

geometric MIC₉₀ was 0.957 µg/mL which is the lowest MIC₉₀ for all tested drugs; the good *in vitro* activities of Voriconazole (VCZ) in the current study have been previously reported against *Candida* spp. obtained from oral candidiasis patients [54-56]. As shown in Table 4, Voriconazole (VCZ) was the most effective drug *in vitro* with GMMICs of 0.957 µg/ml, for *C. albicans*, Omran *et al.* (2018) in Iran previously showed that the GM-MIC₉₀ for Voriconazole (VCZ) were 0.25 µg/ml for *C. albicans* less than our findings [36]. Several other studies also demonstrated that Voriconazole (VCZ) was strong antifungal agents against *Candida* spp. [36, 54-57]. Other studies have shown that ITC is useful for treating patients with DS [37, 58, 59]. Dorocka-Bobkowska and Konopka (2007) reported that AMB, FCZ, and ICZ were effective against 100%, 88.7%, and 87.3% of *C. albicans* and less sensitivity rates equal to 79.6%, 71.4%, and 79.6% respectively for other *Candida* strains [12]. Our results showed that the tested antifungal showed good efficacy for most of the isolates. However, the observed variability between some of the isolates and drug resistance highlights the need for the AFST as a monitor to administer the therapeutic procedure.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Candida albicans* was the most prevalent *Candida* species in Yemeni patients with CADS and was susceptible to both azoles and amphotericin B. In addition, Voriconazole could be a suitable alternative to antifungal agents currently used in the treatment of CADS, as well as in the treatment of recurrent Candidiasis.

Also, the increasing rates of NCAC strains among CADS patients in Yemen should be viewed as both novel and alarming. Extensive observational studies should be performed on all clinical specimens yielding significant growth of *Candida* spp. and the effect of resistance pattern on ICZ. As a consequence of selective pressure, emergence of drug resistance is inevitable. Therefore, future studies should focus on the emergence of drug-resistant *Candida* strains and their frequencies.

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Ethical approval

We have obtained written consent from all cases. Consent was obtained from the participants prior to sample collection. The study proposal was evaluated and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Sana'a University.

Conflict Of Interest

No conflict of interest associated with this work.

Author's Contributions

All authors co-wrote the article and reviewed the results. Laboratory parts and data analysis were performed by Hassan Abdelwahab Al Shamahy.

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