Journal of Advanced Medical and Dental Sciences Research

@Society of Scientific Research and Studies

NLM ID: *101716117*

Journal home page: www.jamdsr.com doi: 10.21276/jamdsr Indian Citation Index (ICI) Index Copernicus value = 100.00

(e) ISSN Online: 2321-9599; (p) ISSN Print: 2348-6805

Review Article

A Comprehensive Review Study on Combat Technologies and Drinking Water Safety Concerns

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ABSTRACT:
Access to safe drinking water is essential for human health, yet microbial contamination remains a significant global concern, particularly in developing regions. This review evaluates the microbiological quality of drinking water and explores the antimicrobial potential of metal-based nanoparticles against bacterial isolates. Studies highlight the widespread presence of pathogens such as *E. coli*, *Salmonella spp.*, and *Vibrio cholerae* in various water sources, underscoring the limitations of conventional water treatment methods. Metal-based nanoparticles, including silver, gold, zinc oxide, and copper oxide, exhibit potent antimicrobial properties through mechanisms such as membrane disruption and reactive oxygen species generation. These nanoparticles have shown effectiveness against biofilms and multidrug-resistant bacteria, making them promising candidates for advanced water treatment technologies. However, challenges such as environmental impact, safety, and scalability require further investigation. Integrating nanoparticle-based solutions with existing systems offers a pathway to addressing microbial contamination and improving global water safety.

Received date: 22 February, 2025 Acceptance date: 15 March, 2025 Published: 23 March, 2025

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This article may be cited as: Bala A, Kumari J, Sharma N, Shalini K, Kumari S, A Comprehensive Review Study on Combat Technologies and Drinking Water Safety Concerns. J Adv Med Dent Scie Res 2025; 13(3):74-81.

INTRODUCTION

Access to clean and safe drinking water is a fundamental requirement for human health and well-being. Despite significant advancements in water treatment technologies, microbial contamination of drinking water remains a major concern worldwide, particularly in developing countries. Contaminated drinking water serves as a vehicle for waterborne diseases caused by bacteria such as *Escherichia coli*, *Salmonella*, *Vibrio cholerae*, and *Shigella*. These pathogens pose severe risks to public health, leading to outbreaks of diarrhea, cholera, and other gastrointestinal diseases. Concurrently, the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacterial strains has exacerbated this issue, highlighting the urgent need for alternative antimicrobial strategies. Metal-based nanoparticles have recently emerged as a promising tool for combating microbial contamination, owing to their unique physicochemical properties and potent antimicrobial activity. This review aims to provide an overview of the microbiological quality assessment of drinking water and explores the antimicrobial effects of metal nanoparticles on bacterial isolates.[1]

Microbial Contamination in Drinking Water

Microbial contamination of drinking water is a critical global challenge, with millions of people affected by waterborne diseases annually. Pathogens such as coliform bacteria, *Salmonella spp.*, *Vibrio spp.*, and *Pseudomonas spp.* are frequently identified in contaminated water sources. These pathogens originate from various sources, including agricultural runoff, industrial waste, and untreated sewage. The presence of microbial contaminants in water is often exacerbated by inadequate water treatment infrastructure, particularly in rural and urban slum areas. Microbial contamination not only affects water quality but also imposes a significant burden on healthcare systems.

Waterborne diseases, such as diarrhea, typhoid fever, and cholera, are primarily linked to the ingestion of water contaminated with fecal matter. In many regions, high levels of fecal coliforms and *E. coli* serve as indicators of contamination, reflecting the presence of pathogenic microorganisms. Seasonal variations, including monsoon floods and droughts, further influence the prevalence of microbial contaminants in drinking water.[2]

Methods of Microbiological Quality Assessment

The microbiological quality of drinking water is evaluated using a range of standardized methods designed to detect and quantify bacterial contamination, ensuring the safety and compliance of water sources with public health standards. One of the most widely utilized techniques is the **Membrane Filtration Method**, which involves passing a water sample through a membrane with a pore size of 0.45 µm, trapping bacteria on the surface, followed by incubation on selective culture media to identify coliform bacteria and *Escherichia coli*. This method is favoured for its simplicity and accuracy in detecting indicator organisms.[3]The **Multiple-Tube Fermentation (MTF) Method**, also known as the Most Probable Number (MPN) technique, is another established approach that estimates bacterial concentrations based on the observation of gas production during lactose fermentation, providing an indirect yet effective quantification of coliforms. Advanced molecular techniques, such as the **Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR)**, have revolutionized microbial detection by allowing the amplification and identification of specific bacterial DNA sequences with high sensitivity and specificity. PCR is particularly advantageous for targeting waterborne pathogens like *Salmonella* and *Vibrio cholerae*, making it invaluable for rapid and precise diagnostics. Additionally, the **Colilert Test** has gained popularity for its rapid detection of total coliforms and *E. coli*, utilizing colorimetric and fluorometric changes triggered by bacterial enzyme activity, offering a convenient solution for on-site testing. Each of these methods has its distinct advantages and limitations, with the choice often influenced by factors such as resource availability, technical expertise, required sensitivity, and the specific pathogens of interest. Together, these methods form a comprehensive toolkit for monitoring the microbiological safety of drinking water, ensuring that contamination risks are promptly identified and addressed.[4]

Health Impacts of Microbial Contamination

Contaminated drinking water is a leading cause of waterborne diseases, particularly in low-income regions. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 485,000 deaths occur annually due to diarrheal diseases caused by unsafe water. Children under the age of five are disproportionately affected, with waterborne illnesses contributing significantly to child mortality.Chronic exposure to microbial contaminants can also lead to long-term health issues, including malnutrition, weakened immunity, and stunted growth. Moreover, waterborne pathogens can exacerbate existing health conditions, such as HIV/AIDS and chronic gastrointestinal disorders. These health impacts underscore the need for effective monitoring and treatment of drinking water to prevent microbial contamination.[5]

Emergence of Antimicrobial Resistance

The growing prevalence of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) among waterborne pathogens is a significant public health concern. Bacteria such as *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, and *Salmonella* spp. have demonstrated resistance to multiple antibiotics, complicating the treatment of waterborne infections. AMR in drinking water sources often arises from the discharge of untreated pharmaceutical waste, agricultural runoff containing antibiotics, and the overuse of antibiotics in human and veterinary medicine.

Traditional disinfection methods, such as chlorination, may not effectively eliminate antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Additionally, the overuse of disinfectants can lead to the formation of disinfection byproducts (DBPs), some of which are harmful to human health. This highlights the urgent need for alternative antimicrobial strategies that are both effective and environmentally sustainable.[6]

Metal-Based Nanoparticles as Antimicrobial Agents

Metal-based nanoparticles have emerged as a cutting-edge solution to mitigate microbial contamination in drinking water, offering a promising alternative to conventional disinfection methods. Among the most studied nanoparticles are silver nanoparticles (AgNPs), gold nanoparticles (AuNPs), zinc oxide nanoparticles (ZnO NPs), and copper oxide nanoparticles (CuO NPs), each of which exhibits remarkable antimicrobial properties attributed to their nanoscale dimensions, high surface area-to-volume ratio, and unique chemical reactivity. The small size of nanoparticles allows them to penetrate bacterial cells more efficiently, making them highly effective against a wide range of waterborne pathogens, including antibiotic-resistant strains. The antimicrobial mechanisms of these nanoparticles are multifaceted, providing robust efficacy against microbial growth. A primary mode of action involves the direct disruption of bacterial cell membranes. When nanoparticles come into contact with bacterial cells, they attach to the membrane, compromising its structural integrity and leading to cell lysis. This interaction not only damages the cell membrane but also facilitates the internalization of nanoparticles into the bacterial cytoplasm.[4]

Additionally, metal-based nanoparticles are known to generate reactive oxygen species (ROS), such as hydroxyl radicals, superoxide ions, and hydrogen peroxide. These highly reactive molecules induce oxidative stress within bacterial cells, damaging essential biomolecules, including lipids, proteins, and DNA. The oxidative stress disrupts critical cellular processes, eventually resulting in cell death. Furthermore, nanoparticles can interact with bacterial DNA and proteins, inhibiting replication and enzymatic activities necessary for bacterial survival. For instance, silver ions released from AgNPs bind to thiol groups in bacterial enzymes, rendering them inactive and disrupting metabolic pathways. Similarly, zinc oxide nanoparticles release Zn^{2+} ions that interfere with bacterial cell wall synthesis, while copper oxide nanoparticles exert toxicity by disrupting redox homeostasis within bacterial cells.[6]

These multiple mechanisms of action make metal-based nanoparticles highly effective antimicrobial agents, capable of targeting both Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria. They also exhibit significant potential in combating biofilm-forming bacteria, which are notoriously difficult to eliminate using traditional methods. The versatility of nanoparticles allows them to be integrated into various water treatment technologies, including filtration systems, coatings for water storage tanks, and photocatalytic systems. By providing a robust and innovative approach to microbial contamination, metal-based nanoparticles represent a critical advancement in ensuring the microbiological safety of drinking water, particularly in the face of emerging challenges like antibiotic resistance and biofilm formation. However, further research is needed to optimize their application and address concerns regarding environmental and human safety.[7]

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This systematic review was conducted to evaluate the microbiological quality of drinking water and the antimicrobial effects of metal-based nanoparticles on bacterial isolates. The review adhered to established guidelines for systematic reviews, such as the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework.A comprehensive and systematic search of peer-reviewed literature was conducted using multiple electronic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, covering publications from January 2017 to September 2024. The search strategy incorporated combinations of the following keywords: "microbiological quality," "drinking water," "antimicrobial activity," "metal nanoparticles," "bacterial isolates," "silver nanoparticles," "gold nanoparticles," "zinc oxide nanoparticles," and "waterborne bacteria." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were employed to refine the search results and ensure the inclusion of relevant studies. Additionally, grey literature, such as conference proceedings and reports, was screened to capture comprehensive evidence on the topic.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

1. Studies assessing the microbiological quality of drinking water samples.
2. Studies investigating the antimicrobial effects of nanoparticles of metals, such as silver, gold, zinc oxide, and copper oxide, on bacterial isolates.
3. Research published in peer-reviewed journals.
4. Studies available in English.
5. Experimental studies with clear methodologies.

Exclusion Criteria:

1. Studies focusing solely on the chemical or physical quality of drinking water.
2. Reviews, meta-analyses, editorials, or commentaries.
3. Studies lacking primary data or detailed methodologies.
4. Articles not related to waterborne pathogens or nanoparticles.

Study Selection and Screening

All retrieved articles were imported into reference management software, such as EndNote or Mendeley, to manage and remove duplicates. The titles and abstracts of the identified studies were independently screened by two reviewers to assess relevance, and full-text articles of potentially eligible studies were further evaluated based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Any discrepancies between reviewers were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer. A standardized data extraction form was used to collect relevant information from the selected studies, including study characteristics (author, year, country, study design), microbiological parameters assessed (e.g., total coliforms, *Escherichia coli*, *Salmonella* spp.), details of nanoparticles used (type, concentration, synthesis method), antimicrobial assessment methods (e.g., minimum inhibitory concentration, disk diffusion, bacterial reduction assays), and key findings such as bacterial contamination levels and antimicrobial effectiveness. The methodological quality of the included studies was evaluated using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools, focusing on criteria such as clarity of objectives, sample representativeness, methodology transparency, and reliability of outcome measures; studies with poor quality were excluded or noted in the analysis. A narrative synthesis approach was employed, grouping and summarizing results under two thematic areas: microbiological quality assessment of drinking water and antimicrobial effects of metal-based nanoparticles on bacterial isolates. The synthesis highlighted key findings, patterns, and gaps in the existing literature.

Table 1: Microbiological Quality of Drinking Water

Author (et al., Year)	Study Design	Location	Sample Type	Microbiological Parameters Assessed	Methodology	Key Findings
Smith et al. (2018)[7]	Cross-sectional	USA	Rural water samples	Total coliforms, E. coli	Membrane filtration	High levels of coliforms in rural water samples
Silva et al. (2018)[8]	Experimental	Brazil	Surface water	Vibrio cholerae, Total coliforms	Membrane filtration	Detected high levels of Vibrio cholerae
Thompson et al. (2019)[9]	Cross-sectional	UK	Bottled water	Total coliforms, E. coli	Plate count and biochemical tests	No significant contamination in bottled water
Kumar et al. (2019)[10]	Longitudinal	India	Groundwater	E. coli, Total coliforms	Culture and MPN	High levels of fecal coliforms
Wang et al. (2020)[11]	Longitudinal	China	Groundwater	E. coli, Enterococci	Membrane filtration, PCR	Seasonal variation in contamination levels
Johnson et al. (2020)[12]	Experimental	India	Urban water supply	E. coli, Salmonella spp.	MPN, PCR	E. coli present in 70% of urban water samples
Chen et al. (2021)[13]	Survey	China	Untreated water sources	Salmonella spp., Vibrio spp.	Culture and biochemical tests	Salmonella spp. detected in untreated water sources
Sharma et al. (2022)[14]	Experimental	India	River water	Total coliforms, Shigella spp.	MPN and culture methods	High prevalence of Shigella spp. in river water
Ahmed et al. (2023)[15]	Cross-sectional	Pakistan	Urban water supply	Total coliforms, E. coli, fecal streptococci	Colilert test and MPN method	Contamination above permissible limits in urban water supply
Lopez et al. (2023)[16]	Survey	Mexico	Rainwater	Total coliforms, fecal coliforms	Membrane filtration	High fecal coliform levels in rainwater samples
Oliveira et al. (2024)[17]	Experimental	Brazil	Tap water	Pseudomonas spp., Legionella spp.	PCR and qPCR	Legionella spp. found in urban tap water samples
Martinez et al. (2024)[18]	Experimental	Brazil	Water treatment plants	E. coli, Pseudomonas spp.	Antibiotic susceptibility testing	Presence of multidrug-resistant Pseudomonas spp. in water

Table 2: Antimicrobial Effects of Metal-Based Nanoparticles

Author (et al., Year)	Study Location	Study Type	Sample Size	Nanoparticle Type	Synthesis Method	Nanoparticle Size (nm)	Antimicrobial Method	Target Bacteria	Environmental Conditions	Key Findings
Lee et al. (2017)[19]	South Korea	Experimental	50	Silver	Green synthesis	10-20	Disk diffusion	E. coli	Neutral pH	Significant inhibition of E. coli growth
Silva et al. (2018)[20]	Brazil	Experimental	40	Silver	Chemical reduction	25	Disk diffusion	Vibrio cholerae	Acidic pH	High inhibition zone against Vibrio cholerae
Kumar et al. (2019)[21]	India	Experimental	60	Zinc oxide	Sol-gel method	30	MIC	Staphylococcus aureus, E. coli	Room temperature	Reduced bacterial counts at 50 µg/mL concentration
Kim et al. (2020)[22]	South Korea	Experimental	45	Titanium dioxide	Hydrothermal synthesis	20	Photocatalytic assay	Escherichia coli	UV exposure	Complete bacterial reduction under UV light
Wang et al. (2020)[23]	China	Experimental	55	Silver	Biosynthesis	15	MIC	E. coli	Neutral pH	Effective bacterial inhibition
Johnson et al. (2021)[24]	USA	Experimental	70	Gold	Green synthesis	12	MIC	Enterococcus faecalis	Aerobic conditions	Effective at low concentrations (10 µg/mL)
Garcia et al. (2022)[25]	Spain	Experimental	65	Gold	Citrate reduction	15	Bacterial reduction assay	Klebsiella pneumoniae	Aerobic conditions	Effective against multidrug-resistant bacteria
Ahmed et al. (2023)[26]	Pakistan	Experimental	50	Zinc oxide	Sol-gel method	30	Bacterial reduction assay	Shigella dysenteriae	Room temperature	Inhibited 95% of bacterial growth at 50 µg/mL

Patel et al. (2023)[27]	India	Experimental	60	Copper oxide	Chemical precipitation	20	Disk diffusion	Pseudomonas aeruginosa	Biofilm environment	Inhibited biofilm formation at 25 µg/mL
Lopez et al. (2024)[28]	Mexico	Experimental	55	Silver-copper	Hybrid nanoparticle	15-25	MIC	Pseudomonas fluorescens	Neutral pH	Synergistic effect on bacterial inhibition
Fernandez et al. (2024)[29]	Brazil	Experimental	75	Zinc oxide	Green synthesis	50	MIC	Salmonella typhi	Neutral pH	Complete bacterial inhibition at 100 µg/mL

DISCUSSION

Significance of Microbial Monitoring in Water Quality Management

Microbial monitoring of drinking water is a critical step in ensuring public health and preventing waterborne diseases. The studies reviewed highlight that the presence of indicator organisms such as total coliforms and *E. coli* serves as a reliable measure of microbial contamination. Smith et al. (2018) reported elevated levels of coliforms in rural water supplies in the USA, emphasizing the inadequacy of sanitation infrastructure in these areas.[7] Similarly, Kumar et al. (2019) observed high fecal coliform counts in groundwater sources in India, which were linked to untreated sewage and agricultural runoff.[10] Seasonal variability in microbial contamination was also evident in the study by Wang et al. (2020), where groundwater in China showed significant fluctuations in *E. coli* and Enterococci levels, particularly during monsoon seasons. These findings collectively stress the importance of regular microbial assessment in identifying contamination trends and implementing timely interventions.[11]

Limitations of Traditional Water Treatment Methods

Traditional water treatment methods, including chlorination and filtration, have been the cornerstone of drinking water safety. However, these methods are often insufficient in addressing the challenges posed by emerging contaminants and antibiotic-resistant bacteria. For instance, Ahmed et al. (2023) found that conventional treatment processes in Pakistan failed to eliminate *E. coli* and fecal streptococci from urban water supplies, resulting in contamination levels exceeding permissible limits.[15] Additionally, Oliveira et al. (2024) detected *Legionella spp.* and multidrug-resistant *Pseudomonas spp.* in treated tap water samples in Brazil, indicating the limitations of existing disinfection practices. The persistence of these pathogens underscores the need for advanced water treatment technologies capable of addressing complex microbial threats. Furthermore, concerns about the formation of harmful disinfection by-products (DBPs) during chlorination highlight the necessity of exploring alternative approaches to ensure water safety.[17]

Role of Nanoparticles in Combating Biofilm Formation

Biofilms represent a significant challenge in water treatment systems due to their ability to protect bacteria from conventional disinfectants. Metal-based nanoparticles have demonstrated remarkable efficacy in disrupting biofilms, making them a promising solution for improving water quality. Patel et al. (2023) showed that copper oxide nanoparticles effectively inhibited biofilm formation by *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* under biofilm-promoting conditions.[27] Similarly, Lopez et al. (2024) reported that hybrid silver-copper nanoparticles exhibited synergistic effects, achieving enhanced biofilm disruption and bacterial inhibition. These findings highlight the potential of nanoparticle-based approaches to address biofilm-related challenges in water distribution systems. By incorporating nanoparticles into water treatment processes, it is possible to prevent biofilm formation and improve the overall efficiency of disinfection methods.[28]

Advances in Nanoparticle-Based Water Treatment

The application of metal-based nanoparticles in water treatment has gained significant attention due to their unique antimicrobial properties. Studies have shown that silver nanoparticles (AgNPs) are particularly effective against a broad spectrum of bacteria, including *E. coli* and *Vibrio cholerae* (Lee et al., 2017; Silva et al., 2018).[19,20] These nanoparticles act through mechanisms such as cell membrane disruption, generation of reactive oxygen species (ROS), and interference with bacterial DNA and protein synthesis. Zinc oxide nanoparticles (ZnO NPs) have also been widely studied for their antimicrobial activity. Kumar et al. (2019) demonstrated that ZnO NPs effectively reduced bacterial counts of *Staphylococcus aureus* and *E. coli* at low concentrations, making them a cost-effective option for water treatment.[21] Moreover, titanium dioxide nanoparticles (TiO_2 NPs) have been employed in photocatalytic systems, where they utilize UV light to degrade organic contaminants and inactivate pathogens, as shown by Kim et al. (2020).[22]

Gold nanoparticles (AuNPs) have emerged as another versatile antimicrobial agent, particularly against multidrug-resistant bacteria. Johnson et al. (2021) reported that green-synthesized AuNPs exhibited potent activity against *Enterococcus faecalis* at low concentrations, demonstrating their potential to address antibiotic resistance in waterborne pathogens.[24] The incorporation of nanoparticles into filtration systems, coatings, and other water treatment technologies further enhances their applicability in real-world scenarios. For example, Lopez et al. (2024) demonstrated the efficacy of hybrid nanoparticles in reducing microbial contamination in treated water, showcasing the versatility of these advanced materials.[28]

Challenges and Future Directions

While the potential of metal-based nanoparticles in water treatment is promising, several challenges need to be addressed for their widespread adoption. One of the primary concerns is the environmental impact of nanoparticles. Studies have raised concerns about the potential release of nanoparticles into aquatic ecosystems, where they may affect non-target organisms and disrupt ecological balance (Garcia et al., 2022). Additionally, the cytotoxicity and genotoxicity of nanoparticles on human health require further investigation to ensure their safe application in drinking water systems.[25]

Another challenge is the scalability and cost-effectiveness of nanoparticle synthesis. Many of the synthesis methods, such as green synthesis and chemical reduction, require optimization to achieve large-scale production without compromising the antimicrobial efficacy of nanoparticles. Furthermore, regulatory frameworks for the use of nanoparticles in water treatment are still underdeveloped, necessitating comprehensive guidelines to ensure their safe and effective use.

Future research should focus on developing multifunctional nanoparticles with enhanced antimicrobial properties and minimal environmental risks. Integrating nanoparticles with existing water treatment technologies, such as nanocomposite membranes and advanced oxidation processes, offers a promising pathway for improving water quality. Additionally, exploring the use of renewable and sustainable resources for nanoparticle synthesis can reduce production costs and environmental impact, making these technologies accessible to low- and middle-income regions where they are most needed.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, ensuring the microbiological safety of drinking water is critical for public health, particularly in the face of emerging microbial threats and antimicrobial resistance. While traditional water treatment methods remain essential, their limitations highlight the need for advanced technologies. Metal-based nanoparticles, with their potent antimicrobial properties, present a promising solution for addressing microbial contamination and biofilm formation in water systems. However, challenges such as environmental safety, scalability, and regulatory concerns must be addressed to enable their widespread adoption. Future research should focus on optimizing nanoparticle applications, ensuring cost-effectiveness, and integrating them into sustainable water treatment frameworks to enhance global water quality and safety.

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