

Physicochemical and thermotolerant faecal coliforms quality of commercial bottled water in Dar es Salaam city in Tanzania

ABSTRACT

Background: There is currently an increased demand and consumption of bottled water in Tanzania especially among the middle and high income earners as it is generally perceived to be pure, clean and of good quality. This has led to the sale of different brands of bottled water on the Tanzanian market. Due to increased demand and consumption of bottled water in Tanzania, there has been a growing concern about the microbiological quality of this product. The objective of this study was to assess the physico-chemical quality parameters and microbial contamination of thermotolerant fecal coliform bacteria.

Materials and methods: This cross sectional study was done in randomly selected ten different commercial brand of bottled water available in commercial market of Dar es Salaam city in Tanzania. Tap water from Dar es Salaam Water Supply Company (DAWASCO) was also sampled for comparison. Fecal coliform were enumerated by the membrane filtration and commercial field testing DelAgua[®] kit. The physicochemical examination of the water samples was done to determine pH, turbidity and Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) of the water samples using a Hach spectrophotometer (Hach Company, Loveland, Colorado, USA).

Results and discussion: 100% (n=10) samples of bottled water showed no any colony forming unit (CFU) of faecal (thermotolerant coliforms) count in the WHO acceptable value (0 cfu/ml). All the surveyed brands of bottled water were safe for drinking as they were devoid of any thermotolerant faecal coliforms bacteria. Tap water from DAWASCO revealed thermotolerant faecal coliforms contamination with mean CFU counts of 4.0/100ml. Coliform organisms found in tap water in this study were above the recommended levels by TBS, IBWA, FDA, USEPA, WHO and the EC. The overall mean results of the physicochemical parameters of bottled water brands and tap water studied were within the recommended limits by TBS and WHO.

Conclusions: The absence of thermotolerant faecal coliform bacteria in the bottled water is indicative of safety for public consumption. Tap water from DAWASCO is unfit for human consumption and it needs to be treated to render it safe for human drinking. Physicochemical parameters revealed that the pH, TDS and turbidity were within the required levels by TBS and WHO. This indicates that, the manufacturers of bottled water brands and DAWASCO are conforming to the TBS and WHO standards on physicochemical requirements for drinking water.

Keywords: Bottled water, thermotolerant, Faecal coliforms, *E.coli*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Bottled water can be defined as any potable water that is manufactured, distributed or offered for sale, which is sealed in food-grade bottles or other containers and intended for human consumption [1]. Bottled water is increasingly perceived as pure, clean, of good quality and protected [2]. Sales of bottled water have increased dramatically in recent years largely because of the public perception of purity and safety and public concern about the quality of tap water [3]. However, consumers need to

be made aware that bottled water is not necessarily safer than tap water. Bottled and municipal water may contain the same microorganisms since both can originate from the same environmental contaminants [1]. Under improper processing, handling and/or prolonged storage of bottled water, bacteria can grow to levels that may be harmful to human health [1]. Consequently, when offered for sale to the consumer, these bottled water products should comply with all of the regulations as set by the Tanzania Bureau of Standards (TBS). According to TBS any harmful bacteria must be absent. Water from surface sources, wells, boreholes, municipal supplies, bottled water and other sources are known vehicles for enteric pathogens such as bacteria, parasites and viruses [4]. Bottled water has previously been implicated as the source of outbreaks of cholera, typhoid fever as well as traveller's disease in countries such as Portugal and Spain [1, 5, 6]. However, in Tanzania little is known about the microbiological quality of bottled water.

In Tanzania, it is mandatory that, manufactures have their water brands certified and registered by the Tanzania Bureau for Standards [7]. Currently, there are influxes by large number of bottled water brands into the market in Tanzania raising doubts for their quality. Bottled water has emerged the highest consumable commodity especially for the middle and high income social classes in urban and peri-urban areas, and since it is processed from various sources using different methods, it is important to examine its quality. There are no recent studies that have been done on the bottled water quality with regard to its microbiological and physico-chemical quality in the Dar es Salaam, city in accordance with TBS and other international standards. The aim of this study was to determine microbiological and physicochemical quality of bottled water brands and tap water from DAWASCO and to evaluate their suitability for drinking purposes, in accordance with the Tanzania Bureau of Standards (TBS), WHO and other international standards for drinking water.

71 2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

72 2.1 Study design

73 The study design is a laboratory based analytical study. The study was carried out in Dar es Salaam
74 city at the National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) laboratory. Water samples from different
75 brands of commercial water were collected from different retail shops located in Dar es Salaam city.
76 The collected water samples were checked for their values in four traits known to be linked to water
77 quality which are pH, hardness and turbidity as well as coli-forms.

78

79 2.2 Study area

80 This study was conducted between July and October 2013 in Dar es salaam, Tanzania. Dar es Salaam
81 is located at 6 48' south, 39 17' East (-6.8000, 39.2833). The city is situated on a massive natural
82 harbor on the Indian Ocean coast of Africa, with sandy beaches in some areas. It is also the country's
83 richest city and a regionally important economic centre. Dar es Salaam is actually an administrative
84 province within Tanzania, and consists of three local government areas or administrative districts
85 Kinondoni to the north, Ilala in the centre of the Region, and Temeke to the south. The Dar es Salaam
86 Region had a population of 4,364,541 as of the official 2012 census. The city is a metropolitan and in
87 some of its settings it is characterized by poor environmental sanitation, poor housing and poverty.

88

89 2.3 Sample collection

90 A total of ten bottled water samples were collected and examined in duplicates. The ten brands of
91 bottled water and tap water from DAWASCO examined are shown in table 1 below.

92 *Table 1 here*

93

94 2.4 Bacteriological examination

95 Bacteriological examination of the samples was conducted by using a DelAgua method. The
96 DelAgua method is a straightforward membrane filtration technique based on sample filtration and
97 incubation to promote the growth of colonies which are then be counted. A known quantity of
98 undiluted sample (in this case, usually 100 ml) was passed through a sterile filter paper, transferring
99 any bacteria present in the sample to the surface of the filter. The filter was then placed in a sterile
100 Petri dish containing a sterile lauryl sulphate growth medium, and incubated at 44°C (+/-0.5°C, due
101 to kit limitations) for 24 hours. Colonies of thermo-tolerant coliform (TTC) were counted and
102 reported as TTC per 100 ml sample. The filtration apparatus was sterilized between samples to
103 prevent any cross-contamination of samples.

104

105 **2.5 Physico-chemical examination**

106 The physico-chemical examination of the water samples was completed within six hours of sample
107 collection. The pH of each water sample was determined immediately after receiving the sample at
108 the laboratory. The turbidity and Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) of the water samples were determined
109 using a Hach spectrophotometer (Hach Company, Loveland, Colorado, USA).

110

111 **3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

112 **3.1 Registration and certification status of sampled bottled water**

113 Table 2 provides the list of ten bottled water brands and tap water studied in this investigation.
114 Currently, the Tanzania Bureau of Standards (TBS) has issued a list of 47 bottled water brands which
115 are registered and certified for human consumption in Tanzania. Though already in the market,
116 among the ten sampled bottled water brands, it emerged that three brands namely; Umoja, Lulu and
117 Volvicare not in the TBS list of certified and registered bottled water brands for human consumption
118 [7].

119 *Table 2 here*

120

121 **3.2 Physicochemical parameters**

122 The overall mean results of the physicochemical parameters of bottled water brands and tap water
123 studied are shown in Table 3. Mean pH of all eleven water samples ranged from 7.0 to 8.1 which were
124 within the set limits of TBS in Tanzania (6.5 – 9.2). In consideration of the WHO limit (6.5 – 8.0),
125 one bottled water sample was an outlier. The mean TDS value ranged from 30 to 150 mg/l and this
126 was also within the recommended WHO specification of up to 500 mg/l. Mean turbidity values of
127 studied water samples ranged between 0.16 to 4.81 NTU. The turbidity levels found in water samples
128 were within the TBS recommended limit (5 – 25 NTU) and still within the recommended values
129 by WHO of 5 NTU.

130

131 *Table 3 here*

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133 **3.3 Microbiological quality**

134 In the present study the mean thermotolerant fecal coliform bacteria CFU counts /100 ml were not
135 found in all ten bottled water brands sampled and investigated in this study (Table 4). The numbers
136 shown are the average measurements of two replicates for each of water brand. However; tap water

from DAWASCO showed contamination with mean CFU counts of 4.0/100ml which is higher than the acceptable levels by TBS and international organization guidelines on bottled drinking water.

Table 4 here

Outbreaks of waterborne diseases, often of epidemic proportions have been occurring if human wastes that are infected with pathogens enter water supplies. These include cholera, typhoid fever and dysentery. Because it would be practically impossible to test for each of the wide variety of pathogens that may be present, microbiological water quality monitoring is primarily based on tests for indicator organisms. The coliform bacteria count is a reliable indicator used to test water for contamination by microorganisms. Coliform bacteria (*Escherichia coli*) live naturally in the human intestinal tract and the average person excretes billions of them in feces each day. The term “coliform bacteria” refers to a group of gram negative bacteria that have a long history of being good indicator of human fecal contamination in water quality assessment. Coliform bacteria are harmless and cause no diseases, but their presence in water is an indication of recent fecal contamination. If none are found, the water is free from fecal contamination and can be assumed to be free from pathogenic organisms, hence fit for human consumption. The drinking water recommended standards set by the TBS, IBWA, FDA, USEPA, WHO and the EC are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 here

With the exception of tap water from DAWASCO, all of the studied bottled water samples complied with microbial safety requirement as per TBS, IBWA, FDA, USEPA, WHO and the EC for drinking water quality.

Kassenga, 2007 investigated 13 brands of bottled water collected from shops, supermarkets and street vendors in Dar es Salaam whereby he only found 4.6% of the brands were contaminated by total and fecal coliform bacteria [8]. Kassenga’s findings revealed that 95.4% of bottled water was free from total and fecal coliform bacteria [8]. Similar findings have been reported by Kassenga and Mbuligwe, 2009 whereby they investigated physico-chemical quality parameters of nine bottled water in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and found the quality to be generally good [9]. Furthermore, comparing Kassenga’s microbiological bottled water quality findings in 2007 and this current observation in this

study, indicates significant improvement in water treatment by the manufacturers as evidenced by the total absence of fecal coliform bacteria in bottled water.

Similar findings have recently been reported by Mihayo and Mkoma, 2012 whereby all bottled drinking water brands available in retail shops in Mwanzacity in Tanzania conformed to TBS and WHO guidelines for drinking water. The study concluded that the bottled water brands were safe for human consumption [10].

With regard to tap water from DAWASCO, Kassenga also found the quality worse with higher total and faecal coliform bacterial counts, hence was unfit for human consumption unless properly disinfected [8]. Principally, bottled water is supposed to be the reliable healthy drinking water in any parts of the world including Tanzania as it is regulated and have to undergo through series of treatments to ensure safety.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

Our findings provides an insight on the physicochemical and microbiological quality of ten bottled water brands currently sold in retail shops in Dar es Salaam city in Tanzania. The results obtained revealed that the pH, TDS and turbidity were within the required levels by TBS and WHO. This indicates that, the manufacturers of sampled bottled water brands and DAWASCO in Tanzania are conforming to the TBS and WHO standards on physicochemical requirements for drinking water. Results also showed the absence of thermotolerant fecal coliforms bacteria in the bottled water brands hence indicative of safety for public consumption. With the exception of DAWASCO tap water, all of the studied bottled water samples complied with microbial safety requirement as per TBS, IBWA, FDA, USEPA, WHO and the EC for drinking water quality. Tap water from DAWASCO is unfit for human consumption and it needs to be treated to render it safe for human consumption. The measured physicochemical and microbiological quality parameters in the brands are within standards limits set by TBS, IBWA, FDA, USEPA, WHO and the EC for drinking water quality. Our findings revealed that the brands of bottled water analyzed are safe for human consumption. However, concerned authority should prioritize on the regular monitoring of drinking water physicochemical and microbial quality conformation of bottled water brands and tap water in Tanzania to continue providing safe drinking water to the population.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

205 The research protocol was approved by the Faculty of Science, Technology and Environmental
206 Studies of the Open University of Tanzania, P.O. Box 23409, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

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234 **Table 1.** Bottled water brand description

Manufacturer	Location	Brand name	Registration & Certification by TBS
1. Bakhresa food products ltd	Dar es Salaam	Uhai	Yes
2. Bonite bottlers ltd	Moshi	Kilimanjaro	Yes
3. Coca cola kwanza ltd	Dar es Salaam	Dasani	Yes
4. A-One products & bottlers ltd	Dar es Salaam	Masafi	Yes
5. Kisarawe Hills	Kisarawe	Umoja	No
6. Sayona drinks ltd	Dar es Salaam	Sayona	Yes
7. Super meals ltd	Dar es Salaam	Cool blue	Yes
8. Masasi Food Industries	Kibaha	Lulu	No
9. Danone	France	Volvic	No
10. Ndanda springs	Mtwara	Ndanda	Yes
11. DAWASCO	Dar es Salaam	Tap water	No

235

236 **Table 2:** Bottled water classification

Manufacturer	Brand name	Registration & Certification by TBS
5.Bakhresa food products ltd	Uhai	Yes
6.Bonite bottlers ltd	Kilimanjaro	Yes
7.Coca cola kwanza ltd	Dasani	Yes
8.A-One products & bottlers ltd	Masafi	Yes
5. Kisarawe Hills	Umoja	No
6. Sayona drinks ltd	Sayona	Yes
7. Super meals ltd	Cool blue	Yes
8. Masasi Food Industries	Lulu	No
9. Danone	Volvic	No
10. Ndanda springs	Ndanda	Yes
11. DAWASCO	Tap water	No

237

238 **Table 3:** Physico-chemical parameters of the bottled drinking water brands and tap water with
239 comparison to the TBS and WHO limit values

Bottled water brand	Mean pH	Mean TDS (mg/L)	Mean Turbidity (NTU)
1. Uhai	7.3	126.7	0.24
2. Kilimanjaro	7.2	113.3	0.33
3. Dasani	7.0	46.7	0.17
4. Masafi	7.5	146.7	0.17
5. Umoja	7.6	70.0	0.17
6. Sayona	8.1	30.0	0.22
7. Cool blue	7.7	30.3	0.18
8. Lulu	7.9	20.0	0.26
9. Volvic	7.3	110.0	0.16
10. Ndanda		70.0	0.21
11. Tap water (DAWASCO)	7.4	150.0	4.81
Standards			
12. TBS	6.5 – 9.2	-	5 – 25
13. WHO	6.5 – 8.0	500	5

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241 **Table 4:** Levels of fecal coliform bacteria in water samples

Bottled water brand	Colon Forming Units per 100mls (CFU/100mls)		
	Measured value 1	Measured value 2	Mean
1. Uhai	0/100	0/100	0/100
2. Kilimanjaro	0/100	0/100	0/100
3. Dasani	0/100	0/100	0/100
4. Masafi	0/100	0/100	0/100
5. Umoja	0/100	0/100	0/100
6. Sayona	0/100	0/100	0/100
7. Cool blue	0/100	0/100	0/100
8. Lulu	0/100	0/100	0/100
9. Ndanda	0/100	0/100	0/100

10. Volvic	0/100	0/100	0/100
11. Tape water (DAWASCO)	5/100	3/100	4/100

Table 5: Guidelines on bottled water limits of microbial contamination

S/N	Authority	Fecal coliform/ <i>E.coli</i>
1.	TBS	0/100 ml
2.	IBWA	0/100 ml
3.	FDA	<2.2/100 ml
4.	USEPA	0/100 ml
5.	WHO	0/100 ml
6.	EC	0/100 ml

***TBS** = Tanzania Bureau of Standards; **IBWA** = International Bottled Water Association;
FDA = Food and Drug Administration; **USEPA** = United States Environmental protection agency; **WHO** =
World Health Organization; **EC** = European Community*