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Antimicrobial Resistance in Northern Nigeria: A Growing Public Health Threat

Auwal Magaji[1,2*], Zinat Mahmud[2], Nathaniel Luka Kwarau[1,3] Musa Abdullahi[4], Abdul Baba Zamo[5] Isyaku Bello[6], Ibrahim Tsoho Rabiu[7], Shamsiyya Shehu[4], Suleiman Musa[4], Abdurashid Adamu[8], and Surajo Sani[4]

[1]Department of Microbiology, Sa'adu Zungur University Gadau, Bauchi State Nigeria.

[2]Department of Microbiology, Federal University of Health Sciences Azare, Bauchi State Nigeria.

[3]Department of Plant Biology, Federal University Dutse, Jigawa State Nigeria.

[4]Department of Science Laboratory Technology, College of Science and Technology, Jigawa State Polytechnic Dutse, Jigawa State Nigeria

[5]Department of Medical Microbiology/Immunology, Federal University of Health Science Teaching Hospital Azare, Bauchi State.

[6]Department of General Studies, Jigawa State College of Education Gumel, Jigawa State, Nigeria.

[7]Primary Healthcare Development Agency, Kiyawa Local Government, Jigawa State.

[8]Department of General Studies, School of Vocational Education Skills and Professional Studies, Federal Polytechnic Daura, Katsina State

Abstract

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has emerged as a rapidly intensifying global health threat, critically undermining the effectiveness of existing treatments and posing severe risks to public health systems worldwide. This growing crisis is fueled by the relentless evolution of drug-resistant pathogens and is particularly severe in low-resource regions such as Northern Nigeria—a vast area comprising 19 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), spanning the North West, North East, and North Central geopolitical zones. The region faces unique and compounding challenges that accelerate the spread of AMR, including limited access to quality healthcare services, underdeveloped laboratory infrastructure, and insufficient regulatory oversight. This review explores the current epidemiological landscape of AMR in Northern Nigeria, examining its primary drivers and far-reaching implications. It highlights a complex interplay of systemic, behavioral, and environmental factors that contribute to the emergence and persistence of resistance. Key among these are the rampant misuse and overuse of antibiotics in both human and veterinary medicine, widespread practices of self-medication, weak antimicrobial stewardship, and the proliferation of counterfeit or substandard pharmaceuticals. Poor healthcare infrastructure and a lack of diagnostic capacity further hinder timely and appropriate treatment, often leading to empirical prescribing practices that exacerbate resistance patterns. Data synthesized from peer-reviewed literature, national and regional surveillance reports, and institutional records reveal troubling trends in AMR prevalence across the region. Compounding these issues is the low level of public awareness about the proper use of antimicrobials and the consequences of resistance, along with inadequate training and enforcement capacity among healthcare providers and pharmacists. The review emphasizes the urgent need for a coordinated, multisectoral One Health strategy that integrates human, animal, and environmental health perspectives. Strengthening AMR surveillance systems, improving diagnostic access, promoting public education, and enforcing regulatory frameworks are critical components of an effective response. Ultimately, the implementation of context-specific, culturally informed, and sustainable interventions is essential to curb the rise of AMR, protect therapeutic efficacy, and secure the health of populations in Northern Nigeria and comparable low-resource settings.

Keywords
Self-medication, Antibiotics, Antimicrobials, Resistance, Stewardship

Corresponding Author: Auwal Magaji, [1]Department of Microbiology, Sa'adu Zungur University Gadau, Bauchi State Nigeria,
Email: auwalmagajiaza@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has become a critical global health challenge, posing a substantial threat to treatment efficacy, public health, and socioeconomic stability worldwide (AMR Collaborators, 2022). The rise of drug-resistant microorganisms, which continuously evolve novel resistance mechanisms, undermines the effectiveness of commonly used antibiotics (Irfan *et al.*, 2022). This alarming trend jeopardizes the treatment of otherwise manageable infections, particularly in resource-limited settings with limited diagnostic capacity and restricted access to second-line therapies (Irfan *et al.*, 2022). The World Health Organization (WHO) projects that AMR could lead to 10 million deaths annually by 2050, with potential global economic losses reaching USD 100 trillion (Sekyere & Asante, 2018). These projections underscore the urgent need for proactive interventions to mitigate the devastating impact of AMR on global health and economies (Sekyere & Asante, 2018).

While resistance genes were identified in bacteria even before the clinical use of antibiotics, the widespread and often unregulated use of antimicrobial agents in human medicine, veterinary practice, and agriculture remains a primary driver of resistance across sectors (Irfan *et al.*, 2022). Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), including Northern Nigeria, face a disproportionately high burden of AMR due to a complex interplay of factors. These factors include limited access to diagnostic facilities, unregulated antibiotic use, widespread self-medication practices, persistent health system challenges, and environmental contamination (Irfan *et al.*, 2022).

In Northern Nigeria, the AMR crisis is particularly alarming. The region grapples with increasing rates of drug-resistant infections, which are becoming more difficult or impossible to treat with available options as bacteria acquire resistance to multiple antibiotics (Chukwu *et al.*, 2020). The situation is exacerbated by the easy availability of over-the-counter antibiotics, frequent empirical prescriptions, the use of antibiotics in livestock production without adequate veterinary oversight (Irfan *et al.*, 2022), and poor public awareness of AMR (Chukwu *et al.*, 2020). Studies in the region have revealed a dire situation, with only 8.3% of surveyed individuals demonstrating adequate understanding of AMR (Chukwu *et al.*, 2020) and low participation in antimicrobial stewardship among healthcare workers (Babatola *et al.*, 2021). This lack of awareness and stewardship contributes to the misuse and overuse of antimicrobials, further fueling the emergence and spread of resistance (Babatola *et al.*, 2021).

The drivers of AMR in Northern Nigeria reflect a complex interplay of sociocultural, economic, and environmental factors (Irfan *et al.*, 2022). Humans and animals often coexist closely in rural and peri-urban settings, increasing the risk of zoonotic transmission and the environmental spread of resistant organisms. Poor sanitation, inadequate waste disposal, and contamination of water bodies with human and animal waste serve as critical pathways for the dissemination of antimicrobial resistance genes (ARGs) in the environment (Irfan *et al.*, 2022). These environmental factors, combined with insufficient regulatory enforcement and high population growth, contribute to the misuse of antibiotics as growth promoters in livestock, creating reservoirs of resistance that can be transmitted through the food chain (Irfan *et al.*, 2022).

Misconceptions persist, such as the belief that antibiotics are effective against viral infections like the flu or malaria, leading to unnecessary antibiotic use. Cultural and economic factors, including the practice of sharing leftover antibiotics and combining them with traditional remedies, further contribute to self-medication and the spread of AMR (Godman *et al.*, 2022; Belachew *et al.*, 2021; Klein *et al.*, 2018).

Addressing AMR in Northern Nigeria requires a comprehensive understanding of its local drivers and the implementation of context-specific interventions. This review focuses on the current burden, key drivers, and strategic responses to AMR in Northern Nigeria, drawing insights from broader sub-Saharan African trends and emphasizing the urgent need for coordinated, context-specific interventions. It also identifies gaps in surveillance and regulation and highlights opportunities for digital health literacy interventions and policy reforms to curb the growing AMR threat in the region. By drawing insights from broader sub-Saharan African trends (Godman *et al.*, 2022; Belachew *et al.*, 2021; Klein *et al.*, 2018), this review emphasizes the urgent need for coordinated efforts to improve antibiotic stewardship, strengthen healthcare systems, and address environmental contamination within a One Health framework.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

This review article focused on Northern Nigeria, a vast and diverse region that comprises three of the country's six geopolitical zones: North West, North East, and North Central. Collectively, these zones encompass 19 of Nigeria's 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), representing a significant portion of the country's landmass and population (Alhassan and Utono, 2021).

North West Zone includes the states of Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara. It is the most populous zone in Northern Nigeria and is predominantly inhabited by Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups. The region is characterized by a Sudan Savannah vegetation zone, semi-arid climate, and a largely agrarian economy with subsistence and commercial farming activities. It also serves as a major hub for livestock rearing and traditional medicine practices (Alhassan and Utono, 2021).

North East Zone Comprising Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe States, this zone is known for its Sahelian and semi-arid conditions, with seasonal rainfall and long dry periods. Ethnic diversity is high, with ethnic groups such as the Kanuri, Fulani, Hausa, and Margi, among others. The zone has faced numerous public health and humanitarian challenges, including armed conflict, displacement, and infrastructural deficits, which have implications for healthcare access and disease surveillance (Alhassan and Utono, 2021).

North Central Zone This zone includes Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau States, and the FCT (Abuja). It lies within the Guinea Savannah belt and experiences a more moderate climate with better rainfall patterns compared to the other northern zones. The region is ethnically diverse and features a mix of rural and urban settings. Its economy is driven by agriculture, mining, and public administration, particularly in the FCT (Alhassan and Utono, 2021).

The inclusion of these three zones in this review provides a comprehensive geographic and socio-economic representation of Northern Nigeria. It allows for a broad analysis of regional variations in healthcare infrastructure, disease prevalence, antibiotic use patterns, and the contributing factors to antimicrobial resistance (AMR). The diversity in climate, culture, and health-seeking behavior across these zones enriches the scope and applicability of the findings to inform policy and public health strategies across the entire northern region.

Search Strategy for the Literature

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using electronic databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, African Journals Online (AJOL), and ScienceDirect. The search included publications from January 2010 to April 2025. Keywords used in various combinations included: "antimicrobial resistance", "antibiotic resistance", "Northern Nigeria", "drug-resistant infections", "multidrug resistance", "bacterial resistance", and "pathogen susceptibility". Reference lists of relevant articles were also manually screened to identify additional sources.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies such as Reports, surveillance bulletins, and reviews relevant to AMR conducted in any of the 19 states of Northern Nigeria reporting antimicrobial resistance patterns in human pathogens were included in the study.

Studies not focused on Northern Nigeria, Articles with insufficient or unclear data on resistance patterns, Research focused solely on veterinary or agricultural AMR without human relevance and non-peer-reviewed content (e.g., blog posts, opinion pieces) were excluded in the study.

Source of Data

The review utilized data from a variety of sources including peer-reviewed research articles, national and regional surveillance bulletins, governmental and non-governmental reports, and academic theses. Priority was given to studies with clearly defined methodologies and laboratory-confirmed antimicrobial susceptibility data relevant to pathogens isolated from human infections in Northern Nigeria.

REGIONAL TRENDS AND EPIDEMIOLOGY OF ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) continues to pose a major threat to public health, with increasing global incidence and consequences that transcend human and veterinary medicine. As of 2019, over 1.2 million deaths were directly attributed to AMR, and projections estimate that this figure may rise to 10 million annually by 2050 if no effective global interventions are undertaken (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024). The impact of AMR is not only medical but also economic, with healthcare systems bearing escalating costs due to prolonged hospital stays, expensive alternative therapies, and increased mortality (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024).

In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported over 2.8 million AMR infections annually, resulting in more than 35,000 deaths (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024). Similarly, the European Union documents over 700,000 infections per year caused by resistant bacteria, leading to more than 33,000 deaths, and incurring healthcare costs exceeding €1.5 billion annually (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024).

In India, the burden of AMR is particularly alarming, with an estimated 50,000 neonatal deaths annually attributed to antibiotic-resistant sepsis. A child reportedly dies every 9 minutes from antibiotic-resistant infections (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024). This statistic underscores the gravity of the resistance crisis in resource-limited settings where healthcare infrastructure is often inadequate to cope with drug-resistant infections.

The Global Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance System (GLASS) by the World Health Organization (WHO) provides significant insight into the global landscape. Among 500,000 patients in 22 countries, the most frequently isolated resistant organisms included *Escherichia coli*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, and *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024). Resistance to ciprofloxacin, a widely used antibiotic for urinary tract infections, ranged between 8.4% and 92.9% in *E. coli*, and 4.1% to 79.4% in *K. pneumoniae*, reflecting major geographical variations. Additionally, penicillin resistance in *S. pneumoniae* reached up to 51% in some regions (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024).

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) remains one of the most concerning resistant pathogens. It accounts for 13–74% of *S. aureus* infections globally. In the United States alone, MRSA affects approximately 119,247 individuals and causes around 19,832 deaths annually (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024). According to the GLASS 2019 report, the median global MRSA prevalence was 12.11%, while resistance of *E. coli* to third-generation cephalosporins showed a median rate of 36%, with an interquartile range between 15.2% and 63% (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024).

The resistance problem extends into the animal health sector, notably in diseases such as bovine mastitis, where *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Escherichia coli* are frequently implicated. These pathogens have demonstrated high resistance rates to commonly used antibiotics like penicillin, tetracycline, ampicillin, and oxacillin (Okello *et al.*, 2023; Zhao *et al.*, 2022). In Brazil, for instance, up to 70% of *S. aureus* isolates were resistant to penicillin, and 60.9% harbored the blaZ gene responsible for β-lactam resistance (de Oliveira *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, studies in China and Argentina report high rates of multidrug resistance among mastitis pathogens (Song *et al.*, 2024; Crespi *et al.*, 2021).

Furthermore, the ability of these organisms to form biofilms—particularly *S. aureus* and *Streptococcus uberis*—compounds the treatment difficulty. For example, *S. aureus* isolates forming biofilms have shown resistance as high as 92.9% to penicillin (Fidelis *et al.*, 2024).

Efforts to address AMR have increasingly emphasized the One Health approach, which integrates human, animal, and environmental health strategies. This model has shown promise in reducing zoonotic transmission of resistant organisms and promoting more sustainable antimicrobial use (Okello *et al.*, 2023; Crespi *et al.*, 2022).

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a growing concern in Nigeria, with studies revealing widespread resistance patterns across both clinical and agricultural settings. A study conducted in poultry farms across Southwestern Nigeria—specifically in Ogbomoso, Ibadan, and Osogbo—reported that 94% of *Escherichia coli* isolates exhibited resistance to multiple antimicrobial agents. High resistance was observed to tetracycline (81%), sulphamethoxazole (67%), streptomycin (56%), ciprofloxacin (42%), and ampicillin (36%), among others (Ajayi *et al.*, 2020). Despite this, all isolates were notably sensitive to amoxicillin-clavulanate, ceftiofur, cefotaxime, colistin, florfenicol, and apramycin, suggesting limited therapeutic options remain effective (Ajayi *et al.*, 2020).

The resistance observed in these isolates was linked to the presence of several resistance genes. Notable among these were bla-TEM (85%) for ampicillin resistance, sul2 (67%) for sulphamethoxazole resistance, and strA/strB (70% and 61%, respectively) for streptomycin resistance. Resistance to tetracycline was conferred by tetA and tetB, while chloramphenicol resistance was associated with cat4l and cmlA1. Additionally, the quinolone resistance gene qnrS was identified in seven out of eight ciprofloxacin-resistant isolates. Geographical distribution of resistance genes showed that all sul3 and tetracycline-resistance gene-positive isolates originated from Ogbomoso, while qnrS was widely distributed across various environmental samples, including poultry droppings, fish pond sediment, and farm soil (Olowe *et al.*, 2021). This suggests the poultry production environment may serve as a significant reservoir for antibiotic resistance genes, potentially enabling transmission to human populations (WHO, 2021).

On a broader scale, a national survey examining *E. coli* isolates from the five major geopolitical zones of Nigeria—South-East, South-West, South-South, North-Central, and North-North—found alarming levels of resistance. Among 89 isolates screened, 94.4% showed resistance to ampicillin, while resistance to cephalothin (92.1%), cotrimoxazole (85.5%), tetracycline (79.8%), and streptomycin (78.7%) was also common. The isolates exhibited 42 distinct antibiotic resistance profiles, with all strains resistant to at least four or more antibiotics (Iwalokun *et al.*, 2019). Such widespread resistance patterns underscore the complexity and severity of AMR across Nigeria (Iwalokun *et al.*, 2019).

Importantly, there was no statistically significant difference in resistance levels between human clinical isolates (84.6%) and environmental or non-clinical isolates (91.7%) (Adegboyega *et al.*, 2020). This finding suggests that antimicrobial use in both medical and agricultural sectors has contributed to the emergence and spread of multidrug-resistant strains. The convergence of resistance patterns in both human and animal sources highlights the urgent need for a One Health approach to AMR surveillance and control in northern Nigeria (FAO, 2020; NCDC, 2021).

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has emerged as a pressing health crisis in Northern Nigeria, driven by a combination of systemic, socio-economic, and behavioral factors. These challenges compromise effective treatment and contribute to increased morbidity, mortality, and healthcare costs (Godman *et al.*, 2022; Labrique *et al.*, 2018; Elijah *et al.*, 2024).

Inadequate Laboratory Infrastructure and Surveillance Systems

One of the major obstacles in combating AMR in the region is the scarcity of dependable laboratories and research centers. Therapeutic decisions are ideally guided by accurate identification of pathogens and their susceptibility profiles; however, this is frequently unattainable in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa due to the absence of well-equipped laboratories with external quality assurance and robust surveillance networks. As a result, empirical treatments are often based on outdated or non-existent local data, undermining clinical outcomes (Labrique *et al.*, 2018; Elijah *et al.*, 2024).

Proliferation of Substandard and Counterfeit Antimicrobials

The pharmaceutical supply chain in Northern Nigeria is saturated with substandard and counterfeit antimicrobial products. This issue arises from weak regulatory oversight, limited domestic pharmaceutical manufacturing, and inadequate quality control mechanisms. These challenges are further compounded by the scarcity of trained personnel and lack of synergy among healthcare professionals, which together erode public confidence and therapeutic efficacy (Godman *et al.*, 2022; Elijah *et al.*, 2024).

Irrational Antibiotic Use and Health Service Gaps

Widespread irrational use of antibiotics significantly fuels AMR in the region. Over-the-counter access to antibiotics without prescription, poor regulatory enforcement, and limited diagnostic capabilities contribute to inappropriate prescribing practices. Furthermore, healthcare delivery remains inconsistent, particularly in rural and underserved areas, leading to uneven access to quality treatment (Labrique *et al.*, 2018; Moke *et al.*, 2019; Godman *et al.*, 2022; Elijah *et al.*, 2024).

Self-Medication and Misinformation

Self-medication is rampant in Nigeria, often driven by financial constraints and widespread availability of antibiotics through informal vendors and online platforms. Many individuals rely on digital sources for medical advice, often encountering misleading or inaccurate information. This fosters dangerous practices, including improper dosing, premature discontinuation of therapy, and the inappropriate use of antibiotics for non-bacterial infections. These behaviors accelerate the emergence of resistant strains and complicate treatment outcomes (Lawal *et al.*, 2025).

Socioeconomic Pressures

Economic hardship contributes significantly to AMR. Individuals frequently purchase incomplete courses of antibiotics or share medications within households to reduce costs. Such practices not only compromise therapeutic success but also promote bacterial survival and adaptation under sub-lethal drug exposure, fostering resistance (Lawal *et al.*, 2025).

Veterinary Antibiotic Misuse and Zoonotic Risk

AMR in livestock, especially in cases like bovine mastitis, represents a significant but often overlooked contributor to the resistance crisis. In countries with large dairy sectors, such as Brazil and potentially mirrored in African contexts, pathogens like *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Escherichia coli* have developed resistance due to routine antibiotic use in animals. This not only increases veterinary treatment costs but also poses zoonotic risks to humans. The One Health framework, which integrates human, animal, and environmental health efforts, has been recommended as a strategic solution for coordinated and sustainable AMR control (Okello *et al.*, 2023; Crespi *et al.*, 2023; Uzoka *et al.*, 2025; Li *et al.*, 2022).

CLINICAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE (AMR) IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has emerged as a major clinical and public health crisis, particularly in low-resource settings like Northern Nigeria. The implications span across increased mortality, weakened healthcare infrastructure, economic losses, and an overall threat to global health security.

Increased Morbidity and Mortality

AMR significantly worsens clinical outcomes, resulting in longer illness durations, frequent treatment failures, and increased mortality rates. In 2019, sub-Saharan Africa recorded the highest AMR-related mortality globally, with 23.5 deaths per 100,000 population (Kariuki & Dougan, 2014). Globally, resistant pathogens cause over a million deaths annually, with projections suggesting up to 10 million deaths per year by 2050 (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024).

Therapeutic Challenges and Limited Treatment Options

The loss of efficacy in first-line antibiotics has led to increased reliance on more toxic and expensive second- and third-line therapies. These alternatives are often inaccessible or unaffordable in many parts of Northern Nigeria (Kariuki & Dougan, 2014; Ahmed *et al.*, 2024). The restricted availability of effective antimicrobials jeopardizes patient safety and limits clinicians' ability to manage common infections.

Prolonged Hospitalization and Healthcare Costs

Patients with resistant infections typically require extended hospital stays and intensive care, placing a greater financial burden on both individuals and the healthcare system (Kariuki & Dougan, 2014; Ahmed *et al.*, 2024). Prolonged treatment regimens further deplete limited resources.

Threats to Modern Medical Practices

AMR threatens the success of routine and advanced medical procedures such as surgeries, chemotherapy, and organ transplants by increasing the risk of untreatable infections (Ndihokubwayo *et al.*, 2013; Ahmed *et al.*, 2024). Immunocompromised patients, including those with HIV/AIDS and diabetes, are particularly at risk.

Overburdened Health Systems

Healthcare systems in Northern Nigeria face immense pressure due to the high prevalence of AMR. This contributes to increased disease burdens, overextended hospital capacities, and complicated infection control measures (Godman *et al.*, 2022).

Community Transmission and Global Health Risks

AMR is not confined to hospital settings. Resistant organisms are increasingly found in community environments and can spread across regions and national borders, underscoring the global nature of the threat (Silbergeld *et al.*, 2008; Ahmed *et al.*, 2024).

Weak Surveillance and Stewardship Programs

Many sub-Saharan African countries, including Nigeria, lack robust AMR surveillance systems and antimicrobial stewardship programs. Limited laboratory infrastructure and poor diagnostic capabilities further exacerbate the situation (Elton *et al.*, 2020; Williams *et al.*, 2018).

Public and Professional Knowledge Gaps

Knowledge of AMR is alarmingly low among healthcare providers and the general public. In Nigeria, only 8.3% of survey respondents demonstrated satisfactory AMR knowledge, while just 28.2% of physicians were familiar with stewardship principles (Chukwu *et al.*, 2020; Babatola *et al.*, 2021).

Antibiotic Misuse and Digital Health Literacy Challenges

Widespread misuse of antibiotics is fueled by misinformation, low digital health literacy, and poor adherence to treatment guidelines. Practices such as self-medication, inappropriate dosing, and the use of antibiotics for non-bacterial infections are common (Lawal *et al.*, 2025). Online pharmacies and unregulated access to over-the-counter antibiotics further exacerbate resistance development (Lawal *et al.*, 2025).

Circulation of Substandard and Counterfeit Drugs

Weak regulatory systems allow the proliferation of fake and substandard antimicrobials. These ineffective treatments contribute directly to resistance and treatment failure (Godman *et al.*, 2022).

Inequity in Healthcare Access

Vulnerable populations, particularly those in rural and low-income communities in Northern Nigeria, face limited access to quality diagnostics and treatment, making them more susceptible to AMR-related complications (Kariuki & Dougan, 2014).

One Health Perspective: Animal and Environmental Implications

The misuse of antibiotics in agriculture and animal health contributes significantly to AMR. Resistant bacteria can be transmitted from animals to humans, posing zoonotic threats (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024). Infections in livestock such as cattle, poultry, and sheep often require culling during outbreaks, resulting in food insecurity and substantial economic losses. Projections indicate that AMR could result in up to \$3-4 billion in losses from livestock alone (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024).

Economic Consequences

The economic impact of AMR is staggering. Globally, it is expected to cause financial losses reaching \$100 trillion by 2050 if current trends continue (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024). The burden on healthcare systems, loss of productivity, and disruption of trade and agriculture could undermine national development goals.

STRATEGIES FOR COMBATING ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE (AMR)

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a multifaceted challenge that demands urgent and coordinated global action. The growing prevalence of resistant pathogens in both human and animal populations—fueled by misuse and overuse of antibiotics, poor surveillance systems, and lack of public awareness—necessitates the implementation of comprehensive, interdisciplinary interventions. Several strategies have emerged as critical in the global fight against AMR, ranging from regulatory and stewardship efforts to public education and technological innovation.

The One Health Approach

The One Health approach recognizes the interdependence of human, animal, and environmental health and calls for integrated action across these domains. This strategy has been widely endorsed as a sustainable solution to curbing AMR, especially in sectors like agriculture and veterinary medicine where misuse of antibiotics is prevalent (World Health Organization, 2023a; Lerner & Berg, 2015).

Implementation of One Health in managing bovine mastitis, for instance, has shown improved treatment outcomes while reducing the need for conventional antimicrobials (Li *et al.*, 2022). Studies suggest that this model enhances antimicrobial stewardship and reduces zoonotic transmission of resistant pathogens by promoting responsible antimicrobial use practices (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023).

Enhanced Surveillance Systems

Robust surveillance is critical to detect emerging resistance trends and inform evidence-based policy decisions. The Global Antimicrobial Resistance and Use Surveillance System (GLASS), launched by the WHO, is a step toward closing critical data gaps, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (WHO, 2023b). Surveillance of antimicrobial use in both human and animal sectors is especially important for identifying resistance hotspots and prioritizing interventions (NCDC, 2017).

Antimicrobial Stewardship Programs (ASP)

Antimicrobial stewardship programs aim to optimize the use of antibiotics to treat infections, reduce inappropriate prescribing, and improve patient outcomes. These programs involve strategies such as rational prescription practices, regular prescription audits, and the implementation of institutional policies (Godman *et al.*, 2017). Stewardship must extend beyond hospitals to include agricultural and veterinary settings, where overuse remains a persistent problem.

Research and Development of New Therapeutics

The stagnation in antimicrobial drug discovery has exacerbated the resistance crisis. There is an urgent need for investment in the development of new antibiotics and alternative therapies such as vaccines, phytotherapeutics, and immunomodulators (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, interdisciplinary research should investigate the mechanisms of resistance—such as horizontal gene transfer—and the socio-cultural factors influencing antimicrobial use in different settings.

Public Awareness and Education

A well-informed public is essential to slowing the spread of resistance. Public awareness campaigns and health education initiatives must emphasize the importance of completing prescribed antibiotic courses, avoiding self-medication, and understanding the ineffectiveness of antibiotics against viral infections (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023). Increasing digital health literacy, particularly in resource-poor settings, will also help counteract misinformation spread through social media and unregulated online pharmacies.

Digital Health and Technology-Based Interventions

Digital platforms, including mobile health applications and social media, can serve as powerful tools for antibiotic education when properly regulated. National eHealth initiatives, in collaboration with technology firms and healthcare institutions, can improve public understanding of AMR and promote responsible antibiotic use (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023). Efforts should focus on multilingual, culturally adapted content and accessible offline platforms to ensure inclusivity.

Policy Reforms and Multisectoral Collaboration

Effective AMR control requires enabling policies that support surveillance, regulate antimicrobial use, and promote research funding. Governments must collaborate with international organizations such as the WHO, FAO, and OIE to implement global action plans (WHO, 2023a). National regulatory agencies should be strengthened to enforce antibiotic use guidelines and oversee antimicrobial distribution systems (NCDC, 2017).

Sustainable Alternatives to Antimicrobials

Alternatives such as vaccines and plant-based therapies show promise in reducing reliance on antibiotics. For instance, phytotherapies have demonstrated antimicrobial properties without promoting resistance, while vaccines help prevent infections and thereby reduce antibiotic demand (Okello *et al.*, 2023; Li *et al.*, 2022). Integrating these alternatives within the One Health framework could be a game-changer in managing infectious diseases sustainably.

CONCLUSION

Antimicrobial resistance in Northern Nigeria presents a severe and growing threat to public health, economic development, and healthcare sustainability. The region's high burden of resistant infections is driven by a combination of irrational antibiotic use, limited diagnostic capacity, poor public awareness, and widespread circulation of counterfeit and substandard drugs. Inadequate surveillance and weak regulatory frameworks further hinder effective control. Without urgent, coordinated interventions, AMR will continue to undermine treatment outcomes, escalate healthcare costs, and jeopardize medical advancements. Addressing this crisis requires integrating human, animal, and environmental health strategies within a robust One Health framework, alongside targeted policies and inclusive public engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this review, the following recommendations were drawn:

1. Strengthen AMR Surveillance Systems: Establish and equip regional laboratories with robust diagnostic and reporting capabilities to monitor resistance trends and inform treatment guidelines.
2. Enforce Antimicrobial Regulations: Strengthen regulatory oversight to curb over-the-counter antibiotic sales, ensure quality control of drugs, and monitor antibiotic use in agriculture and human medicine.
3. Promote Public Education and Health Literacy: Launch culturally tailored awareness campaigns to educate the public on responsible antibiotic use, the dangers of self-medication, and AMR prevention strategies.
4. Implement Antimicrobial Stewardship Programs (ASPs): Integrate ASPs across healthcare facilities and veterinary practices to promote rational prescription and monitor antimicrobial usage.
5. Adopt the One Health Approach: Foster collaboration between human, animal, and environmental health sectors to reduce zoonotic transmission and environmental dissemination of resistance genes.
6. Support Research and Development: Invest in innovative research on new therapeutics, alternative treatments such as phytotherapy and vaccines, and social behavior influencing antibiotic use.
7. Leverage Digital Health Tools: Develop and deploy mobile apps and platforms to disseminate accurate information, track antibiotic usage, and improve treatment compliance in underserved areas.
8. Address Socioeconomic Barriers: Improve access to affordable healthcare, especially in rural communities, to reduce dependence on informal antibiotic sources and incomplete treatments.

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