

**Alternations in Enzyme Activities of *Clarias gariepinus* Infected with  
*Aeromonas hydrophila* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa***

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**ABSTRACT**

*Clarias gariepinus* were infected with *Aeromonas hydrophila* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, and blood samples were collected weekly for biochemical analysis to analyse **there ....thier** enzyme activities and pathogenesis for four weeks. The enzymes includes: aspartate aminotransferase (AST), alkaline phosphatase (ALP), acid phosphatase (ACP) and lactate – dehydrogenase (LDH). The fish were distributed in three different groups in triplicates as: control (C<sub>1</sub> C<sub>2</sub> C<sub>3</sub>), *A. hydrophila* (A<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>2</sub>, A<sub>3</sub>) and *P. aeruginosa* (P<sub>1</sub>, P<sub>2</sub>, P<sub>3</sub>). After two weeks of acclimatization, A<sub>1</sub> – A<sub>3</sub> were injected with 1.5ml of 10<sup>6</sup> cfu/ml of *A. hydrophila*, P<sub>1</sub>-P<sub>3</sub> were injected with 1.5ml of 10<sup>6</sup> cfu/ml of *P. aeruginosa*, while C<sub>1</sub>-C<sub>3</sub> were pathogen free. At the end of the experiment, it was observed that there was a constant increase, in the enzyme activities of the infected fish, indicating increase in virulence with respect to weeks of exposure but *P. aeruginosa* had higher pathogenicity compared to *A. hydrophila*.

**Keywords:** *P. aeruginosa*, *A. hydrophila*, Enzyme, Virulence, Pathogenicity.

## Introduction

Aquaculture remains the fastest growing food industry in the world (8), because of the high demand for protein by man and other animals. The importance of aquaculture by man can never be over emphasized. The high demand for aquacultural products have led to employment opportunities in both developed and developing societies (23). Water is an essential factor in aquaculture, because the physico-chemical parameters of the aquatic environment determines the success of aquaculture in that environment. The source of water for the practice of aquaculture plays a key role and the biological or industrial activities in the area of practice affects the water quality (15, 16).

Aquacultural products such as fish are open to a wide range of bacterial pathogens (19), which have the capacity to cause diseases. These pathogens can only cause infections, disease and death if the fish is immunosuppressive as a result of nutritional imbalance or stress, arising from ill practice (3).

Diseases are the major causes of mortality in aquaculture. Of all the disease causing micro organisms, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and *Aeromonas hydrophila* are known to cause high mortality in farms, with common symptoms such as skin ulcers, fin rot, haemorrhages, abscess etc. (4,12). The presence of these organisms in farms have led to severe economic losses and reduction in productivity (11). There ...Thier effects are mostly in fish organs, immune system and blood parameters (5, 14). Though the type of feed administered to fish promotes the growth and survival of some micro organisms in the fish environment (22), with good pond management and farm practice, the rate of disease occurrence and economic losses in aquaculture can be drastically reduced.

This research is not only focused on the effect of the pathogens on the fish, but also on the pathogenesis/pathogenicity.

### **3. Materials and Method**

#### **3.1 Fish**

A total of 90 (ninety) *Clarias gariepinus* weighing between 110 – 120g were ..... was purchased from IDI- ONYANA farm along Ahoada – Abua Road in Rivers State, Nigeria. They were transported to the project site in Port Harcourt by the use of anaesthetics. They were acclimatized for two weeks (14 days) to ascertain their health status.

#### **3.2 Feeding and Experimental Set-up**

Feeding with commercial feeds (coppens) started twenty four (24) hours after stocking. After two weeks of feeding, ten (10) fish per tank were randomly distributed for *A. hydrophila*, *P. aeruginosa* infections, and control in triplicate (A<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>2</sub>, A<sub>3</sub> and P<sub>1</sub>, P<sub>2</sub>, P<sub>3</sub>. and C<sub>1</sub>, C<sub>2</sub>, C<sub>3</sub>).

#### **3.3 Bacterial Challenge**

The bacterial pathogens were purchased from the National Veterinary Research Institute, Vom, in Jos, Plateau State in Nigeria. 1.5ml of 10<sup>6</sup>cfu/ml of an overnight grown bacterial pathogen were...was injected intraperitoneally into the fish in each tank accordingly, using 2ml injection syringe, but the control was not injected with pathogen.

Feeding continued after the bacterial challenge for four weeks, while observations were made on the fish.

### **3.4 Biochemical Test for Enzymes**

At the end of each week, blood samples were randomly collected from the fish in each tank via caudal venous puncture method, using 5ml injection syringe. The collected blood samples were transferred into LITHUM HEPARIN tube and sent to the laboratory for biochemical analysis within twelve (12) hours. They were assayed for aspartate aminotransferase (AST), alanine aminotransferase (ALT), alkaline phosphatase (ALP), acid phosphatase (ACP) and lactate-dehydrogenase (LDH). This was done by the use of “Evolution 3000 machine” an auto-analyzer, the screen master model, manufactured by Biochemical system. It was used according to manufacturers instructions.

### **4. Statistical Analysis**

One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyse the results, while Durcan multiple range test was used to evaluate differences between treatments.

### **5. Result**

No mortality was recorded at the end of the experiment. Physical Examination of the fish showed serious ulceration on the fish's skin between the first and the second week of the *A. hydrophila* infected fish (figure 1), but recovery process started from the third week. The fish infected with *P.aeruginosa* had red blood patches on the skin and reduction in weight progressed to the end of the experiment (figure 2).



**Figure 1:** Physical diseases signs shown on fish infected with *A. hydrophila*, at the end of the second week.

There were significant differences in all the enzymes activities of the experimental fish compared to the control in all the weeks (tables 1-4).

Enzyme activities were constant in the control groups, but they were increased as the period of infection of the bacteria increased, though at different rates in the infected fish.



**Figure 2:** Physical diseases signs shown on fish infected with *P. aeruginosa*, at the end of the second week.

The pathogenicity of the bacteria in all the treated fish is shown in figures 3-6. It indicates the rate of virulence of the bacteria on the infected fish.

**Table 1: Changes in Enzymes Activities in *C.gariepinus* Challenged with *Aeromonas* and *Pseudomonas Spp* Bacteria in the First Week of Exposure**

Enzymes ( $\mu$ /l)	Control Fish	<i>Aeromonas</i> challenged fish	<i>Pseudomonas</i> challenged fish
AST	84.56 $\pm$ 4.16 <sup>a</sup>	110.00 $\pm$ 2.00 <sup>b</sup>	107.33 $\pm$ 13.61 <sup>b</sup>
ALT	9.00 $\pm$ 2.00 <sup>a</sup>	15.66 $\pm$ 3.21 <sup>b</sup>	26.33 $\pm$ 3.05 <sup>c</sup>
ALP	7.66 $\pm$ 4.16 <sup>a</sup>	19.35 $\pm$ 1.52 <sup>b</sup>	38.66 $\pm$ 6.65 <sup>c</sup>
ACP	62.00 $\pm$ 12.16 <sup>a</sup>	75.35 $\pm$ 5.68 <sup>b</sup>	85.35 $\pm$ 7.25 <sup>c</sup>
LDH	220.61 $\pm$ 12.16 <sup>a</sup>	269.71 $\pm$ 16.50 <sup>b</sup>	295.71 $\pm$ 15.86 <sup>c</sup>

Means within the same row with different superscripts are significantly different (P<0.05)

**Table 2: Changes in Enzymes Activities in *C.gariepinus* Challenged with *Aeromonas* and *Pseudomonas Spp* Bacteria in the Second Week of Exposure**

Enzymes ( $\mu$ /l)	Control Fish	<i>Aeromonas</i> challenged fish	<i>Pseudomonas</i> challenged fish
AST	86.33 $\pm$ 3.78 <sup>a</sup>	121.17 $\pm$ 8.08 <sup>b</sup>	130.15 $\pm$ 15.27 <sup>b</sup>
ALT	9.66 $\pm$ 2.18 <sup>a</sup>	25.00 $\pm$ 4.00 <sup>b</sup>	31.67 $\pm$ 4.16 <sup>c</sup>
ALP	8.00 $\pm$ 3.26 <sup>a</sup>	30.66 $\pm$ 5.13 <sup>b</sup>	48.68 $\pm$ 8.07 <sup>c</sup>
ACP	63.60 $\pm$ 16.09 <sup>a</sup>	85.66 $\pm$ 11.13 <sup>b</sup>	104.00 $\pm$ 11.11 <sup>c</sup>
LDH	221.61 $\pm$ 28.18 <sup>a</sup>	299.11 $\pm$ 12.41 <sup>b</sup>	327.19 $\pm$ 13.54 <sup>c</sup>

Means within the same row with different superscripts are significantly different (P<0.05)

**Table 3: Changes in Enzymes Activities in *C.gariepinus* Challenged with *Aeromonas* and *Pseudomonas Spp* Bacteria in the Third Week of Exposure**

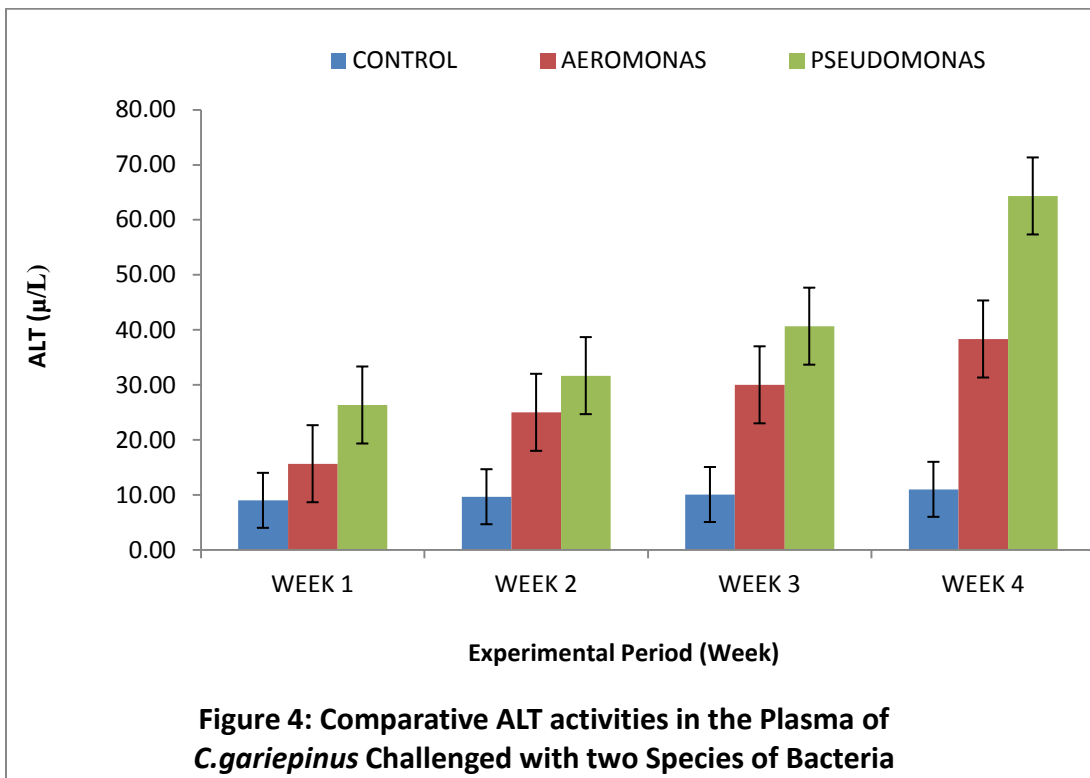
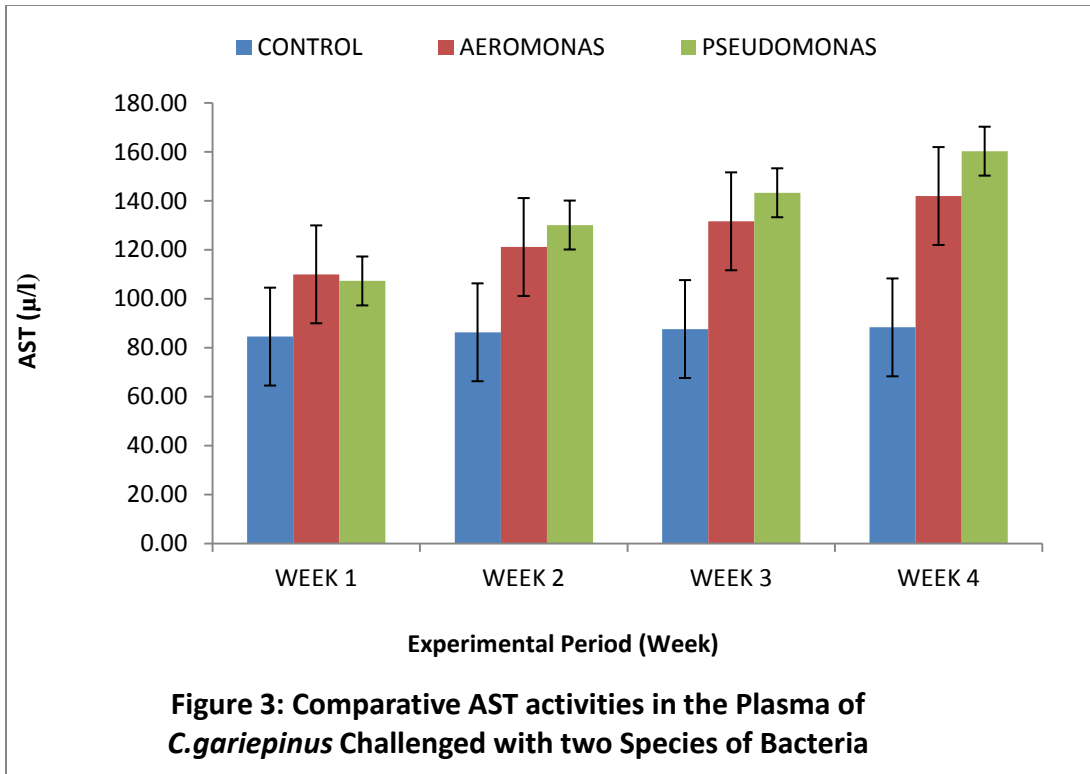
Enzymes ( $\mu$ /l)	Control Fish	<i>Aeromonas</i> challenged fish	<i>Pseudomonas</i> challenged fish
AST	87.66 $\pm$ 2.51 <sup>a</sup>	131.67 $\pm$ 5.16 <sup>b</sup>	143.33 $\pm$ 3.78 <sup>b</sup>
ALT	10.06 $\pm$ 2.51 <sup>a</sup>	30.00 $\pm$ 2.64 <sup>b</sup>	40.66 $\pm$ 1.52 <sup>c</sup>
ALP	9.66 $\pm$ 3.21 <sup>a</sup>	37.33 $\pm$ 8.62 <sup>b</sup>	65.67 $\pm$ 2.51 <sup>c</sup>
ACP	63.01 $\pm$ 18.12 <sup>a</sup>	92.68 $\pm$ 17.00 <sup>b</sup>	119.00 $\pm$ 17.32 <sup>c</sup>
LDH	221.67 $\pm$ 28.96 <sup>a</sup>	335.00 $\pm$ 51.91 <sup>b</sup>	376.00 $\pm$ 10.04 <sup>c</sup>

Means within the same row with different superscripts are significantly different (P<0.05)

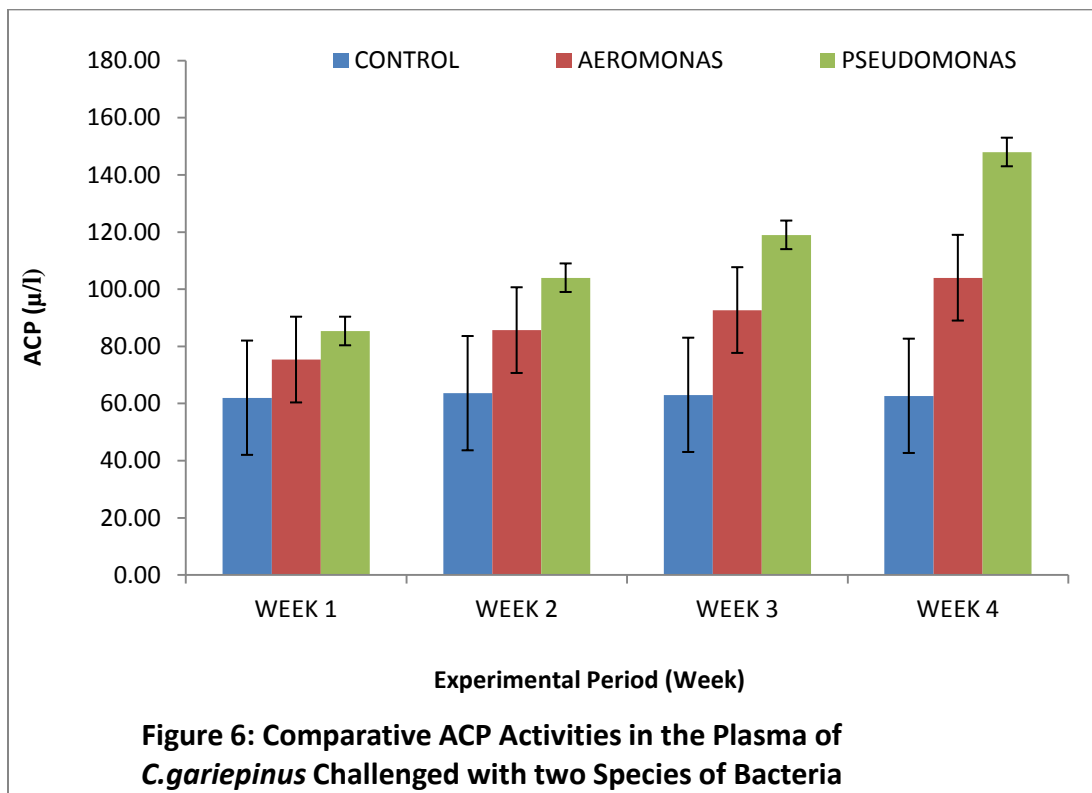
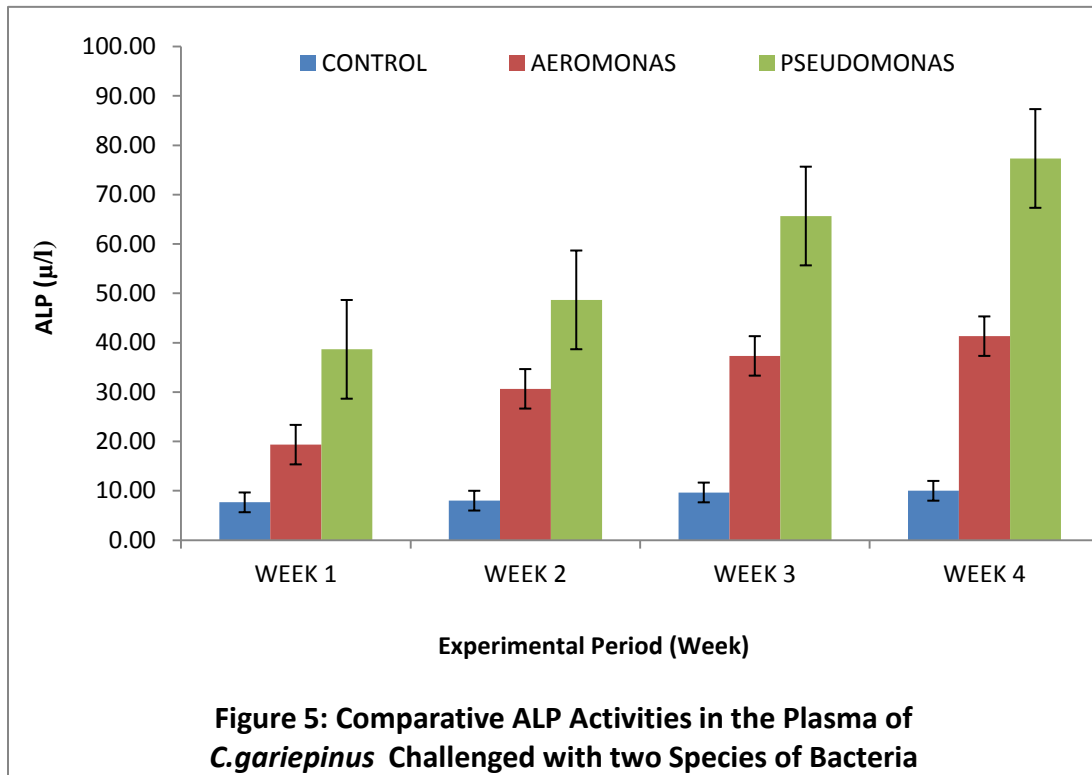
**Table 4: Changes in Enzymes Activities in *C.gariepinus* Challenged with *Aeromonas* and *Pseudomonas Spp* Bacteria in the Fourth Week of Exposure**

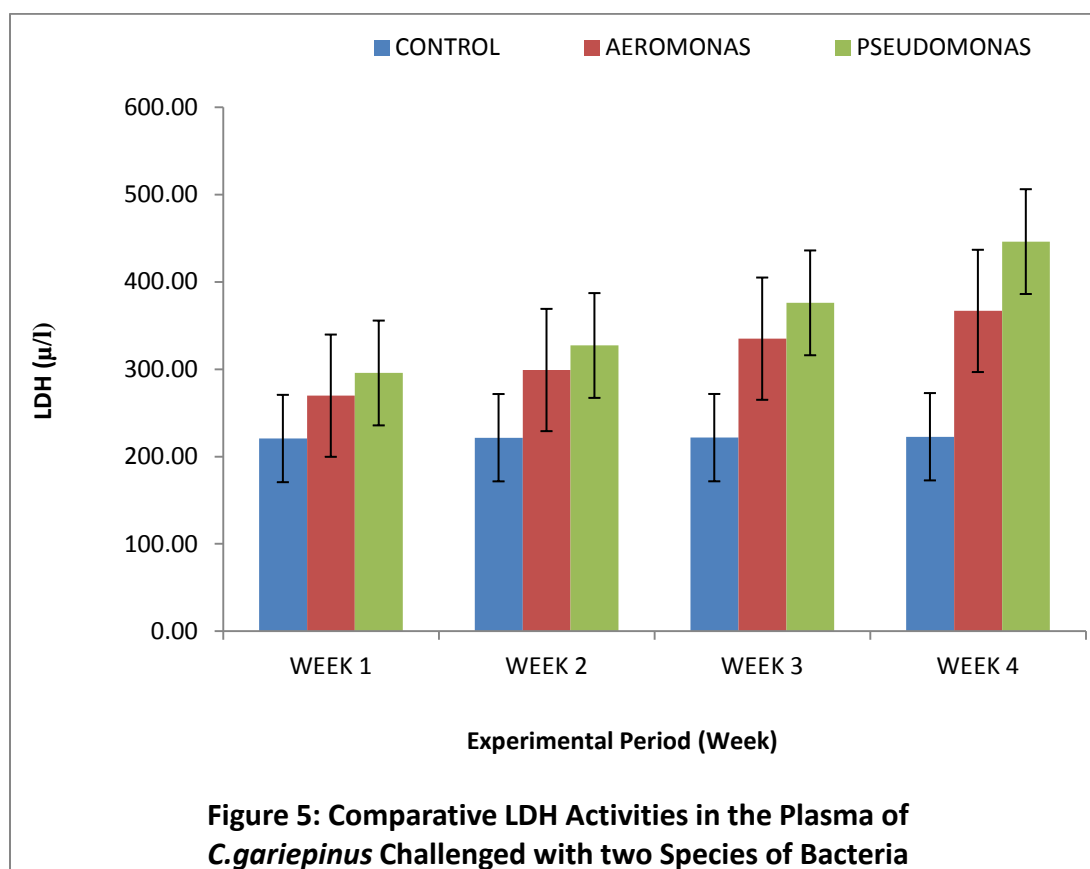
Enzymes ( $\mu$ /l)	Control Fish	<i>Aeromonas</i> challenged fish	<i>Pseudomonas</i> challenged fish
AST	88.33 $\pm$ 3.78 <sup>a</sup>	142.00 $\pm$ 6.00 <sup>b</sup>	160.33 $\pm$ 4.16 <sup>b</sup>
ALT	11.00 $\pm$ 3.60 <sup>a</sup>	38.33 $\pm$ 3.05 <sup>b</sup>	64.33 $\pm$ 6.42 <sup>c</sup>
ALP	10.00 $\pm$ 2.64 <sup>a</sup>	41.33 $\pm$ 8.02 <sup>b</sup>	77.33 $\pm$ 7.66 <sup>c</sup>
ACP	62.66 $\pm$ 12.22 <sup>a</sup>	104. $\pm$ 14.74 <sup>b</sup>	148.00 $\pm$ 16.82 <sup>c</sup>
LDH	222.71 $\pm$ 37.23 <sup>a</sup>	366.78 $\pm$ 29.67 <sup>b</sup>	446.14 $\pm$ 42.01 <sup>c</sup>

Means within the same row with different superscripts are significantly different (P<0.05)









## Discussion

Physical observation of the fish infected with *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and *Aeromonas hydrophila* showed severe hemorrhage and ulceration on the skin and fins of the fish, this is in agreement with previous results and reports (2, 4), it also confirmed the findings of (10), who reported skin hemorrhage, deep ulcers and fin rot, when Nile tilapia was infected with *A.hydrophila*. Fish exhibits non-specific responses to checkmate disturbances or stress and maintain physiological balance (6). But the fish's health is usually affected negatively, if the said stress is sustained. Some of these stress caused by contaminants, pollutants, pathogens etc can be detected in the blood, by analyzing some of its components for disease conditions and metabolic

alterations in the fish (7). AST, ALT, ACP and ALP are known to be biomarkers in assessing the level of damage to body organs and health status of animals (17, 25). Some of the conditions that leads to the increase in the LDH of animals includes pulmonary infarction, hepatic dysfunction, haemolysis and myopathy (21). The increase in LDH values is also an indication of acute cell damage that leads to its presence in the blood (13.)

The increase in the AST, ALT, ALP, ACP and LDH activities in the *A. hydrophilla* and *P.aeruginosa* infected fish, compared to the control indicates that the effects of the pathogens on the infected fishes stimulated the activities of AST and ALT enzymes. This may be due to hepatic cells injury or increased synthesis of the enzymes by the liver, (24). Aspartate aminotransferase catalyzes the reversible transfer of a L-amino group between aspartate and glutamate thereby making it an important enzyme in amino acid metabolism. AST is found in the liver, heart, skeletal muscle, kidneys, brain, and red blood cells. Serum AST level, serum ALT level, and their ratio (AST/ALT) are commonly measured clinically, as biomarkers for liver health. Alanine aminotransferase is found in plasma and in various bodily tissues, but is most commonly associated with the liver. It catalyzes the transfer of an amino group from L-alanine to  $\alpha$ -Ketoglutarate, the products of this reversible transamination reaction being pyruvate and L-glutamate. Elevated levels of ALT often suggest the existence of other medical problems such as viral hepatitis, diabetes, liver damage, bile duct problems, congestive heart failure, infectious mononucleosis or myopathy (18), and the results of this work with elevated level of ALT in the fish infected with the pathogens suggests that there is organ damage in the infected fish.

Acid phosphatase is an enzyme that acts to liberate phosphate under acidic conditions and is made in the liver, spleen, bone marrow and prostate gland. Elevations are usually due to

infections, injury or cancer of the prostate. The increase observed here is as a result of the effect of the pathogens (*A. hydrophilla* and *P. aeruginosa*).

Damaged or injurious fishes release more LDH into the blood stream. It is increased in liver disease, heart attack, anaemia, trauma, bone fracture, cancer and infections such as meningitis and encephalitis (9). The LDH enzyme catalyzes the conversion of lactate to pyruvate. This is an important step in energy production in cells, heart, kidneys, liver and muscle. It is increased when cells are damaged or destroyed in lymphoma, leukaemia, testicular or ovarian cells, and also in non cancerous cells such as heart, lungs or kidney disease and high levels of LDH indicates acute or chronic cell damage (20). The organs of the fish infected with *P. aeruginosa* and *A. hydrophilla* were damaged according to (20). This is in disagreement with several authors concerning bacterial infection (1), who observed that the tilapia infected with *streptococcus agalactiae* did not alter the enzymes of the fish. But it is in agreement with (11), who observed that increase in enzymatic activities of the plasma was associated with organs damage in *Anguilla* infected with *vibro anguillarum*.

The increase in the LDH, AST, ALP could be as a result of damages to the heart, liver, brain, blood cells and lungs (13). Though both pathogens showed damaging effects on the organs of fish as revealed by the enzymatic activities in this research work, the results show that *A. hydrophilla* caused the production of more AST in the first week of infection compared to *P. aeruginosa*, but the *P. aeruginosa* became more virulent from the second to the fourth week of the experiment. For the other enzymes, (ALT, ALP, ACP, and LDH), the rate of increase in their production was higher in *P. aeruginosa* than *A. hydrophilla* throughout the experiment.

## Conclusion

*P.aeruginosa* and *A.hydrophila* have been observed as infectious bacteria causing diseases such as ulcers and hemorrhage in fresh water fish. This experiment showed that these bacteria increase the enzymatic activities of some plasma enzymes, which is an indication of organ damage in the fish. Though both pathogens have been confirmed to be harmful to the fish, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* is seen in this experiment to be more virulent with higher pathogenicity in *Clarias gariepinus*, when compared with *Aeromonas hydrophila*.

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