

Evolving patterns of macrolide and fluoroquinolone resistance in *Mycoplasma genitalium*: an updated systematic review and meta-analysis

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Summary

Background Over the past 5 years, since publication of the initial review, studies have provided additional data on macrolide and fluoroquinolone resistance in *Mycoplasma genitalium*, including data from regions previously lacking this information. We aimed to provide contemporary estimates of macrolide and fluoroquinolone resistance in *M genitalium* to inform national, regional, and global treatment guidelines.

Methods This is an update of a previous systematic review and meta-analysis, which was performed up to Jan 7, 2019. In this update, we searched PubMed, Embase, and MEDLINE from Jan 1, 2018, to April 18, 2023, for published studies reporting macrolide, fluoroquinolone, or dual-class (macrolide and fluoroquinolone) resistance in *M genitalium*. Data were combined with the previous meta-analysis to examine resistance prevalence in *M genitalium* samples collected up to and including 2021. Random-effects meta-analyses were used to calculate summary estimates of prevalence. Subgroup analyses by WHO region and four time periods (before 2012 to 2018–21) were performed. This study was registered with PROSPERO, number CRD42021273340.

Findings 166 studies (59 from the previous search period reporting data from *M genitalium* samples collected between 2003 and 2017, and 107 from the updated search period reporting data from *M genitalium* samples collected between 2005 and 2021) were included: 157 reporting macrolide resistance (41 countries; 22 974 samples), 89 reporting fluoroquinolone resistance (35 countries; 14 165 samples), and 74 reporting dual-class resistance (34 countries; 11 070 samples). In 2018–21, the overall prevalence of macrolide, fluoroquinolone, and dual-class resistance were 33.3% (95% CI 27.2–39.7), 13.3% (10.0–17.0), and 6.5% (4.0–9.4), respectively. Over time, there was a slight, although not statistically significant, decline in macrolide resistance in the Western Pacific and the Americas, but there was an increase in macrolide resistance in the European region. Fluoroquinolone resistance was highest in the Western Pacific and increased in the European non-Nordic region. ParC S83I was the most common variant associated with fluoroquinolone resistance, increasing from 0% (95% CI <0.0001–0.30) before 2012 to 7.3% (4.7–10.3) in 2018–21; $p_{\text{trend}}=0.055$.

Interpretation Macrolide and fluoroquinolone resistance in *M genitalium* requires ongoing international surveillance, use of resistance assays for optimal antibiotic stewardship, and novel treatment options.

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Introduction

Mycoplasma genitalium is a sexually transmitted bacterium with few effective treatment options. A single-dose of azithromycin, a macrolide, has been widely used as first-line treatment. However, this has resulted in selection of resistance-conferring mutations in the 23S rRNA gene in at least 10% of infections,¹ and is likely to have contributed to the rapid increase in macrolide resistance mutations in *M genitalium* (from 10.0% before 2010 to 51.4% in 2016–17).² Coinciding with this increase in resistance was a decline in efficacy of single-dose azithromycin for urogenital *M genitalium*: from 85.3% before 2009 to 67.0% between 2009 and 2015.³

Rising macrolide resistance has increased the use of the fluoroquinolone moxifloxacin over the past decade, with a concomitant decrease in moxifloxacin efficacy.⁴ The mechanism of resistance to fluoroquinolones is not completely understood, but is known to be associated with specific amino acid changes in the topoisomerase subunit ParC.^{5–8} In our earlier systematic review² of studies with data collected up to 2017, we reported that 7.7% (95% CI 4.5–11.4) of people harboured specific amino acid changes in ParC associated with moxifloxacin treatment failure (S83I, S83R, D87N, and D87Y), with no change over time. There were, however, few studies available for analysis and those that were available were

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See Online for appendix

Research in context

Evidence before this study

Our previous systematic review (published in 2020) included 59 studies from 21 countries, reporting macrolide and fluoroquinolone resistance data in *Mycoplasma genitalium* samples collected between 2003 and 2017. This research revealed that macrolide resistance had increased from 10% before 2010 to 51% in 2016–17. The prevalence of fluoroquinolone resistance and dual-class (macrolide and fluoroquinolone) resistance were 8% and 3%, respectively, in 2016–17. Since our previous systematic review, there has been a substantial increase in publications reporting macrolide and fluoroquinolone resistance in *M genitalium*, including from countries previously lacking resistance data. The only systematic review and meta-analysis of resistance in *M genitalium* that has been published since our earlier review reported resistance in Europe from 25 studies with data up to 2017. The authors found that macrolide resistance prevalence exceeded 50% and fluoroquinolone resistance was 5%, but there has been no update for other WHO regions. We did not identify any systematic review or meta-analysis examining the prevalence and trends of individual ParC and GyrA amino acid changes that drive fluoroquinolone treatment failure.

Added value of this study

This systematic review and meta-analysis presents updated estimates of the prevalence of antimicrobial resistance in *M genitalium*. This update includes an additional 107 studies (accounting for 55 245 samples collected between 2005 and 2021) across 41 countries (20 more than last time) spanning four WHO regions (African region, Region of the Americas, European region, and Western Pacific region). 166 studies contributed resistance data to this systematic review and meta-analysis, which provides

limited to specific geographical regions. Recent studies have shown that the DNA gyrase subunit GyrA, particularly amino acid change M95I, plays an additive role in fluoroquinolone treatment failure by increasing the risk of failure when combined with a ParC S83I change.^{8,9}

Since the publication of our original systematic review and meta-analysis,² an increasing number of publications have provided data on macrolide and fluoroquinolone resistance in *M genitalium*, including data from regions previously lacking this information. Furthermore, growing evidence confirms the role of ParC in fluoroquinolone treatment failure, especially the amino acid change S83I.^{8,10} To obtain a more comprehensive picture of antimicrobial resistance in *M genitalium*, we updated our systematic review and meta-analysis to report trends in resistance prevalence in *M genitalium* samples collected up to and including 2021. We also analysed trends of specific ParC and GyrA amino acid changes over time because accumulating evidence suggests the significance of certain ParC and GyrA changes in fluoroquinolone treatment failure.

resistance estimates up to and including 2021. Based on available published data, the global prevalence of macrolide resistance was 33% in 2018–21, a decrease from 42% in 2015–17, although not statistically significant. Globally, the prevalence of dual-class resistance increased to 7% in 2018–21, with the highest levels again reported in the Western Pacific at 29%. There were substantial differences between regions in both estimates and trends. Our results show that the ParC S83I variant is the most dominant fluoroquinolone resistance-associated change overall and has continued to increase, which has important implications for the efficacy of fluoroquinolones.

Implications of all the available evidence

Although there were no further increases in global macrolide and fluoroquinolone resistance levels in the 2018–21 period, our results should be interpreted with caution, as data availability varied among countries, time periods, and specific study populations. The differences between regions in both estimates and trends were probably due to differences in antibiotic availability, antibiotic use, and treatment guidelines, although it is important to note that in some regions, data availability was limited to a few countries. Not unexpectedly, resistance across all antibiotic classes was higher in men than women, because of the high rate of resistance in men who have sex with men. As a sexually transmitted infection with very limited effective antimicrobial options, assays for *M genitalium* that detect resistance markers are becoming increasingly important to guide treatment. Ongoing national, regional, and global surveillance of macrolide and fluoroquinolone resistance in *M genitalium* will be important in informing guidelines to ensure optimal antibiotic stewardship and cure.

Methods

Search strategy and selection criteria

We did a systematic review and meta-analysis of published estimates of macrolide and fluoroquinolone resistance in *M genitalium*. This Article is an update of a previously published systematic review and meta-analysis, which covered published studies from inception of the database to Jan 7, 2019.² In this update, we searched PubMed, Embase, and MEDLINE from Jan 1, 2018 to April 18, 2023, using the search terms previously described (appendix p 6).² We did not search grey literature (ie, conference abstracts, unpublished studies, or reports). Two authors (T-PC and LAV) independently screened abstracts and reviewed full-text articles to determine eligibility. Disagreements were resolved by discussion with DAM and CSB. Studies were eligible for inclusion if they provided the proportions of macrolide or fluoroquinolone resistance, or both, as described in the appendix (p 7). Studies analysing only samples collected at test-of-cure and those with an overall sample size of fewer than ten people who tested positive for *M genitalium* were excluded. If the same dataset was analysed in more than one publication, the publication

with the most comprehensive dataset, or the earliest publication, was included.

Data extraction and analysis

T-PC extracted data using a standardised electronic form, which was checked for transcription errors by LAV; discrepancies were resolved through discussion with DAM and CSB. For fluoroquinolone resistance, data from the previous review were extracted again to incorporate the two additional amino acid changes S83C and S83N (appendix p 7). Variables extracted included author, publication year, study country, study period, setting (eg, sexually transmitted infection [STI] clinic, hospital, or primary care), recruitment method, detection method (ie, the assay used to detect *M genitalium* and each category of resistance mutation), and *M genitalium* prevalence across the study population (when reported). Where available, we extracted information reported by study authors about sex (men or women), age, symptom status, and HIV status for patients positive for *M genitalium*. Within each category of resistance-associated mutations (ie, macrolide, fluoroquinolone, or dual class), the total number of samples successfully tested for resistance markers and frequency of each specific mutation were extracted, as previously described.² Data were extracted by year of specimen collection, sex, and male sexual orientation (ie, men who have sex with women and men who have sex with men). In this updated systematic review and meta-analysis, we also extracted the frequency of each of the individual amino acid changes for ParC (S83I, S83R, S83N, S83C, D87N, and D87Y) and GyrA (M95I, D99N, D99Y, and D99G) from included studies in the original and updated systematic review and meta-analysis, where reported (appendix p 7). For brevity, mutations in protein encoding genes will be referred to by the associated amino acid change. Authors were contacted for additional information where required. Methodological assessment of the risks of bias in individual studies was performed by T-PC, according to criteria adapted from published checklists, as previously described (appendix p 8),^{2,11,12} with consultation with LAV, DAM, and CSB, as required.

Prevalence of resistance-associated mutations was defined as the sum of samples with at least one key mutation in the 23S rRNA or *parC* genes or both (numerator) divided by the total number of *M genitalium* samples that were successfully sequenced for the corresponding gene (denominator). The following analyses were performed using Stata, version 18.0. We generated summary average estimates using random-effects meta-analysis, with 95% CIs estimated with the score method, after applying the Freeman-Tukey double arcsine transformation.¹³ We reported 95% prediction intervals (95% PIs) to assess the amount of heterogeneity between studies and I^2 values as a measure of consistency between studies.^{14,15} Subgroup and univariable meta-regression analyses were performed by year of specimen collection (before 2012, 2012–14, 2015–17, and 2018–21), WHO-defined geographical regions, sex (men or women), and male sexual orientation (ie, men who have sex with women and men who have sex with men).

The WHO European region was further stratified into Nordic countries and non-Nordic countries, as previously described.² We conducted the trend test in meta-regression across all time periods by treating the study period dummy ordered categorical variable (ie, <2012, 2012–14, 2015–17, and 2018–21) as continuous using the `metareg` command in Stata.¹⁶ The significance of the coefficients indicated differences from the reference category, which was the earliest timepoint (ie, <2012). To test for significance between just two timepoints (2015–17 vs 2018–21), we restricted our meta-regression analysis to these periods, using the earlier of the two timepoints as the reference category. We did not investigate publication bias because the current methods are not appropriate for meta-analyses of prevalence data.¹⁵

This systematic review and meta-analysis is registered with PROSPERO (CRD42021273340) and reported according to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (appendix pp 4–5).

Role of the funding source

The funder of the study had no role in study design, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, or writing of the report.

Results

166 studies were included in our systematic review and meta-analysis, 59 (36%) of which were part of the previous review² and 107 (64%) of which were identified in our updated search (figure 1).^{8,9,17–172} The included studies reported data collected between 2003 and 2021 (table 1) from 41 countries (20 countries more than in the previous analysis). 78 (47.0%) studies were from the WHO European region (19 countries), 52 (31.3%) from the Western Pacific (nine countries), 23 (13.9%) from the Americas (six countries), and 12 (7.2%) from the African region (seven countries). No studies were identified from the Eastern Mediterranean or South-East Asian WHO regions. Most of the samples were taken from STI clinic attendees (11 170 [48.6%], 7131 [50.3%], and 5769 [52.1%] for macrolide, fluoroquinolone, and dual-class resistance, respectively; table 1). The absence of random selection was the main source of bias (12 articles [<10%] performed random selection). Assessment of risk of bias for individual studies can be found in the appendix (pp 57–61).

For prevalence estimates of macrolide resistance mutations, 157 studies from 41 countries contributed 22 974 samples (14 008 [61.0%] from the updated search) collected between 2003 and 2021 (table 1; appendix pp 72–74). The majority (14 413 samples [62.7%]) were from the European region (3802 [16.5%] from Nordic countries and 10 611 [46.2%] from non-Nordic countries), followed by 5575 (24.3%) from the Western Pacific region, 1451 (6.3%) from the Americas, and 1051 (4.6%) from the African region (table 1). From studies with data collected from 2018 to 2021, the global summary prevalence of macrolide resistance mutations was 33.3% (95% CI 27.2–39.7; 95% PI <0.0001–87.6) with considerable variability between regions

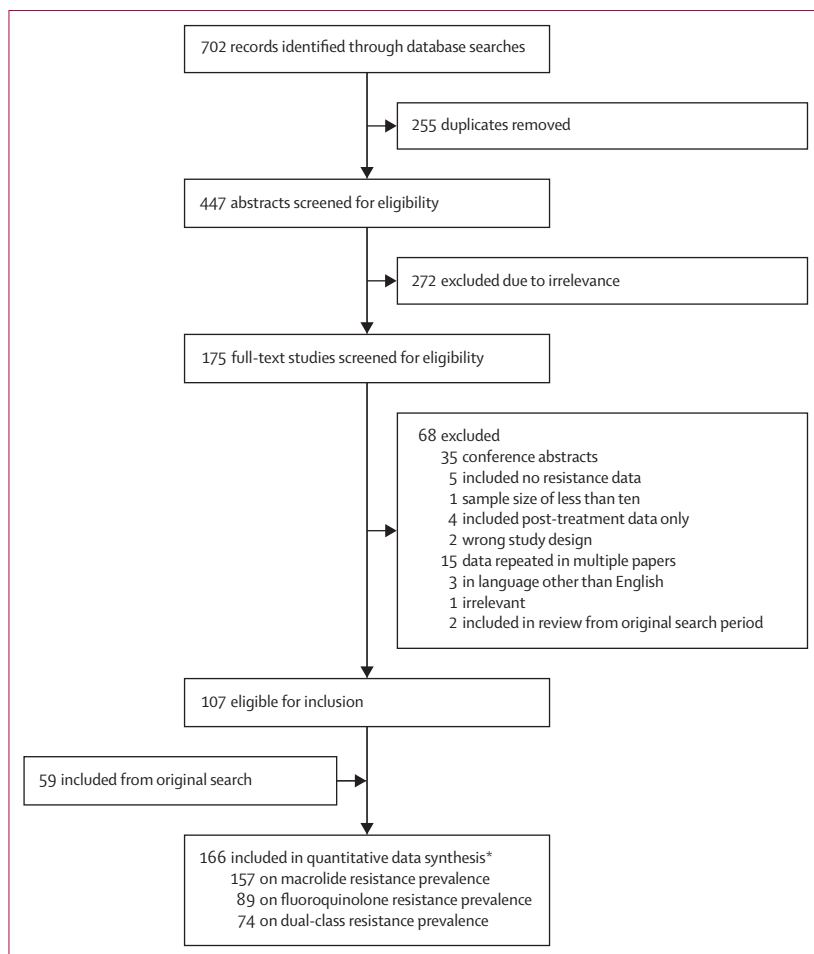


Figure 1: Study selection

Prevalence was defined as the proportion of *Mycoplasma genitalium*-positive specimens with single nucleotide polymorphisms in 23S rRNA gene for macrolide resistance and the *parC* gene for mutations associated with fluoroquinolone resistance. *Some studies reported more than one resistance type.

(table 2). From 2018 to 2021, macrolide resistance was highest in Nordic countries (56.8%, 95% CI 47.0–66.3), followed by the Americas (53.0% [95% CI 34.6–71.0; 95% PI 2.5–99.4]), the Western Pacific (46.5% [29.0–64.4; <0.0001–100]), the non-Nordic European countries (43.2% [35.8–50.7; 5.2–86.4]), and the African region (0.13% [<0.0001–2.3; <0.0001–11.1]; appendix p 62). In country-level analyses of data from 2018 to 2021, prevalence ranged from 0.0% to 86.7% (appendix pp 73–74). Macrolide resistance was higher in *M genitalium* samples collected from STI clinics (49.0% [95% CI 42.9–55.1; 95% PI 3.8–95.4]) compared with non-STI clinics or community (25.5% [19.2–32.3; <0.0001–80.0]; table 2).

In analyses of macrolide resistance prevalence over time, the overall prevalence reached a high of 42.4% (95% CI 35.6–49.2; 95% PI <0.0001–97.2) in 2015–17 before a slight, although not statistically significant, decline to 33.3% (27.2–39.7; <0.0001–87.6) in 2018–21 (figure 2A). In the Western Pacific and Americas, prevalence over time peaked in 2015–17 at 59.0% (49.7–67.9; 11.7–98.0) and

63.7% (52.4–74.4; 19.6–97.9), respectively, but this was also not statistically significant (figure 2A). Among Nordic countries and the rest of Europe, macrolide resistance prevalence increased over time from 20.4% (10.7–32.1; <0.0001–71.9) before 2012 to 56.8% (47.0–66.3) in 2018–21 ($p_{\text{trend}}=0.031$) and 4.6% (0.72–10.5; <0.0001–28.4) before 2012 to 43.2% (35.8–50.7; 5.2–86.4) in 2018–21 ($p_{\text{trend}}<0.0001$), respectively (figure 2A). The African region had the lowest prevalence of macrolide resistance mutations and no variation over time (figure 2A). Detailed trends for individual countries with sufficient data are presented in the appendix (appendix pp 63–64).

For prevalence estimates of fluoroquinolone resistance-associated mutations, 89 studies from 35 countries contributed 14 165 samples (10 162 [71.7%] from the updated search) collected between 2005 and 2021 (table 1; appendix pp 72–74). Overall, 8284 samples (58.5%) were from the European region (1020 [7.2%] from Nordic countries and 7116 [50.2%] from non-Nordic countries), 3845 samples (27.1%) from the Western Pacific region, 725 samples (5.1%) from the Americas, and 810 samples (5.7%) from the African region (table 1). The global prevalence of fluoroquinolone resistance-associated mutations was 13.3% (95% CI 10.0–17.0; 95% PI <0.0001–46.3) in 2018–21 (table 2). Prevalence was highest in the Western Pacific region (40.5% [26.6–55.1; 0.70–91.5]), followed by the European non-Nordic countries (12.3% [10.3–14.5; 4.2–23.6]), the Americas (5.5% [2.0–10.3; <0.0001–21.0]), and the African region (5.1% [0.28–13.1; <0.0001–36.6]; appendix p 65). When analysing country-specific data from 2018 to 2021, prevalence ranged from 0.0% to 73.3%, with the lowest estimates generally seen in countries from the Nordic region and the highest in countries from the Western Pacific (appendix pp 73–74). In temporal analyses, the overall prevalence of fluoroquinolone resistance did not change over time (figure 2B), and the largest change was seen in the European non-Nordic region, where prevalence increased from 1.7% (95% CI <0.0001–5.6; 95% PI <0.0001–12.2) before 2012 to 12.3% (10.3–14.5; 4.2–23.6) in 2018–21 ($p_{\text{trend}}=0.036$; figure 2B). There were no changes in prevalence in the Western Pacific or African regions, and there were insufficient data to analyse trends among Nordic countries and the Americas. Detailed trends for individual countries with sufficient data are presented in the appendix (p 66).

For dual-class (macrolide and fluoroquinolone) resistance, 74 studies from 34 different countries contributed 11 070 samples (7790 [70.4%] from the updated search) collected between 2005 and 2021 (table 1; appendix pp 72–74). Overall, 7112 samples (64.2%) were from the European region (926 [8.4%] from Nordic countries and 6186 [55.9%] from non-Nordic countries), 2218 samples (20.0%) from the Western Pacific, 575 samples (5.2%) from the Americas, and 740 samples (6.7%) from the African region (table 1). In 2018–21, the global summary prevalence of dual-class resistance was 6.5% (95% CI 4.0–9.4; 95% PI <0.0001–32.4; table 2). The highest prevalence

was seen in the Western Pacific region (29.0% [11.0–51.1; <0.0001–97.3]), followed by the European non-Nordic region (7.3% [5.1–9.8; 0.1–21.6]), the Americas (4.3% [0.92–9.3]), and the African region (0.0% [<0.0001–0.40; <0.0001–0.7]; appendix p 67). In analyses of individual countries, prevalence ranged from 0.0% to 60.2%, with the lowest prevalence in Nordic countries and countries in the African region (<5.0%; appendix pp 73–74). The overall prevalence of dual-class resistance increased before 2012 to 2018–21, which was seen in both the European non-Nordic and the Western Pacific regions (figure 2C). Detailed trends for individual countries with sufficient data are presented in the appendix (p 68).

We also analysed the frequency of individual ParC S83 and D87 changes. 90 studies from 36 countries contributed 14 038 samples. Overall, ParC S83I was the most common variant (6.9% [95% CI 4.5–9.7; 95% PI <0.0001–45.2]); other S83 and D87 changes were less than 1%. In temporal analyses, only the frequency of ParC S83I increased, from 0.0% (<0.0001–0.30; <0.0001–4.5) before 2012 to 7.3% (4.7–10.3; <0.0001–36.1) in 2018–21 ($p_{\text{trend}}=0.055$; figure 3; appendix p 69). Only 42 studies (7971 samples) from 24 countries reported the frequency of individual GyrA amino acid changes. As the frequency of GyrA variants was less than 0.50% overall, there were insufficient data for further analyses.

In analyses stratified by sex, summary prevalence estimates were higher in men than women for all classes of resistance markers: 44.9% (95% CI 39.1–50.8; 95% PI 0.40–96.4) versus 23.9% (19.3–28.8; <0.0001–76.0), respectively, for macrolide resistance ($p<0.0001$); 14.6% (9.9–20.0; <0.0001–68.8) versus 6.5% (3.9–9.6; <0.0001–36.3), respectively, for fluoroquinolone resistance ($p=0.0070$); and 7.7% (4.0–12.4; <0.0001–57.0) versus 0.96% (0.11–2.4; <0.0001–13.8), respectively, for dual-class resistance ($p=0.0010$; figure 4A; appendix p 75). Prevalence was also higher among men who have sex with men than men who have sex with women: 65.2% (95% CI 55.5–74.4; 95% CI 4.0–100.0) versus 36.2% (26.8–46.0; <0.0001–91.0), respectively, for macrolide resistance ($p<0.0001$); 16.0% (10.7–21.9; <0.0001–55.6) versus 8.9% (4.5–14.2; <0.0001–41.3), respectively, for fluoroquinolone resistance ($p=0.050$); and 9.9% (5.0–15.7; <0.0001–50.9) versus 2.7% (0.50–5.9; <0.0001–21.7), respectively, for dual-class resistance ($p=0.011$; figure 4B; appendix p 75). When men who have sex with men were excluded from analysis, men still had a higher prevalence of resistance than women ($p=0.018$, 0.22, and 0.070 for macrolide, fluoroquinolone, and dual-class resistance, respectively; figure 4C; appendix p 75).

There was high heterogeneity in the estimates between studies, as shown by the large prediction intervals for the overall estimate and in subgroups of studies in different regions and study populations. Stratifying data by year of sample collection, WHO geographical region, sex, sexual orientation, or source of recruitment did not meaningfully reduce this heterogeneity (table 2; appendix pp 62, 65, 67). Other sources of potential heterogeneity (eg, symptoms,

	Macrolide resistance (23S rRNA)	Fluoroquinolone resistance (parC)	Dual-class resistance (23S rRNA and parC)
Overall	157 (8826/22 974)	89 (2408/14 165)	74 (1085/11 070)
Publication year (range)	2011–23	2010–23	2014–23
Period of sample collection (range)	2003–21	2005–21	2005–21
WHO geographical regions*			
European region†	78 (4838/14 413)	44 (789/8284)	38 (391/7112)
Western Pacific region†	45 (3148/5575)	27 (1510/3845)	19 (655/2218)
Americas region†	23 (765/1451)	12 (65/725)	9 (34/575)
African region†	14 (23/1051)	9 (35/810)	9 (3/740)
Other‡	1 (52/484)	1 (9/501)	1 (2/425)
Period when specimen was collected§			
Before 2012	26 (675/2673)	11 (70/521)	9 (1/440)
2012–14	37 (1262/4238)	20 (456/2261)	17 (40/1703)
2015–17	72 (3033/7253)	35 (588/3566)	29 (153/2442)
2018–21	61 (3630/8385)	44 (1135/7449)	36 (517/5825)
Setting			
Included STI clinics	82 (5258/11 170)	47 (1293/7131)	40 (806/5769)
Non-STI clinics or community¶	57 (2426/7091)	27 (588/3137)	24 (173/2523)
Not reported	18 (1142/4713)	15 (527/3897)	10 (106/2778)
Sex			
Female	99 (2085/8110)	52 (404/4271)	41 (108/3271)
Male	106 (5302/10 720)	64 (1554/7116)	53 (759/5292)
Sexual orientation			
Men who have sex with women	38 (889/2181)	27 (215/1625)	24 (94/1398)
Men who have sex with men	52 (1797/2546)	38 (360/1818)	35 (273/1694)

Data are number of studies (number of *Mycoplasma genitalium*-positive specimens with resistance or number of successfully characterised *M genitalium* positive specimens), unless stated otherwise. Prevalence was defined as the proportion of *M genitalium*-positive specimens with single nucleotide polymorphisms in 23S rRNA gene for macrolide resistance and the parC gene for mutations associated with fluoroquinolone resistance. STI=sexually transmitted infection. *None of the studies were from the WHO South-East Asia region. One study¹⁵³ included data from the WHO Eastern Mediterranean region (Morocco), which has been included with the African region. †Balkus and colleagues²⁶ contributed data for countries in the Americas region (USA) and the African region (Kenya), Fernández-Huerta and colleagues⁶⁵ contributed data for countries in the European region (Spain) and the Western Pacific region (Australia), Shipitsyna and colleagues¹⁵³ contributed data for countries in the European region (Malta), the Americas region (Guatemala and Peru), and the African region (Morocco and South Africa). ‡There were 484, 501, and 425 samples for macrolide, fluoroquinolone, and dual-class resistance, respectively, from French overseas territories (New Caledonia, French Polynesia, French Guyana, La Réunion Island, and Mayotte), which were analysed separately from the European region. §Year of collection was not known for 18 samples. ¶Included seven community-based studies.

Table 1: Characteristics of the 166 included studies

HIV status, and age) were not consistently reported and, therefore, we could not account for these in our analysis.

Discussion

Based on available published data, the estimated global prevalence of macrolide resistance in *M genitalium* peaked at 42.4% in 2015–17, before decreasing—albeit not statistically significantly—to 33.3% in 2018–21. This non-significant decline following 2017 was also observed in the Western Pacific and the Americas, whereas available data from Europe showed a continued rise in macrolide resistance. Overall fluoroquinolone resistance remained unchanged (14.0% in 2015–17 and 13.3% in 2018–21), although it increased in the European non-Nordic region from 8.1% in 2015–17 to 12.3% in 2018–21. Dual-class resistance prevalence increased slightly from 4.7% in 2015–17 to 6.5% in 2018–21, with the Western Pacific

	Macrolide resistance (23S rRNA; n=157)				Fluoroquinolone resistance (<i>parC</i> ; n=89)				Dual-class resistance (23S rRNA and <i>parC</i> ; n=74)			
	Summary prevalence (95% CI; 95% PI)	I ²	Mean difference (95% CI)*	p value	Summary prevalence (95% CI; 95% PI)	I ²	Mean difference (95% CI)*	p value	Summary prevalence (95% CI; 95% PI)	I ²	Mean difference (95% CI)*	p value
Overall	37.3% (32.9 to 41.8; <0.0001 to 90.6)	97.8%	NA	NA	13.3% (9.9 to 17.1; <0.0001 to 60.0)	97.0%	NA	NA	6.5% (4.0 to 9.4; <0.0001 to 45.4)	96.1%	NA	NA
Year of specimen collection												
Before 2012	13.1% (7.8 to 19.2; <0.0001 to 68.1)	91.8%	1 (ref)	NA	7.1% (0.082 to 19.9; <0.0001 to 82.2)	92.1%	1 (ref)	NA	0.0% (0.0 to 0.0; 0.0 to 0.0)	0.0%†	1 (ref)	NA
2012–14	25.7% (18.3 to 33.8; <0.0001 to 85.7)	96.4%	12.3% (1.6 to 22.9)	0.024	15.2% (6.2 to 26.9; <0.0001 to 87.2)	97.5%	9.2% (-5.9 to 24.3)	0.23	0.81% (0.047 to 2.2; <0.0001 to 7.4)	54.1%	2.1% (-8.3 to 12.6)	0.69
2015–17	42.4% (35.6 to 49.2; <0.0001 to 97.2)	96.6%	24.7% (15.2 to 34.2)	<0.0001	14.0% (8.7 to 20.0; <0.0001 to 63.6)	94.4%	4.8% (-9.3 to 18.9)	0.50	4.7% (2.3 to 7.6; <0.0001 to 26.0)	80.3%	6.1% (-4.1 to 16.2)	0.24
2018–21	33.3% (27.2 to 39.7; <0.0001 to 87.6)	96.7%	19.5% (9.8 to 29.2)	<0.0001	13.3% (10.0 to 17.0; <0.0001 to 46.3)	93.5%	3.8% (-9.8 to 17.4)	0.58	6.5% (4.0 to 9.4; <0.0001 to 32.4)	92.1%	8.7% (-1.0 to 18.3)	0.079
WHO regions												
European	38.0% (32.5 to 43.6; 1.6 to 85.7)	97.7%	1 (ref)	NA	8.4% (6.7 to 10.3; 0.70 to 22.0)	84.4%	1 (ref)	NA	4.6% (3.0 to 6.4; <0.0001 to 19.0)	87.8%	1 (ref)	NA
Western Pacific	50.5% (42.2 to 58.8; 4.7 to 95.7)	97.3%	14.2% (5.8 to 22.7)	0.001	35.6% (24.8 to 47.2; <0.0001 to 92.2)	98.1%	28.3% (20.6 to 35.9)	<0.0001	24.3% (11.8 to 39.6; <0.0001 to 92.6)	98.2%	22.5% (14.0 to 30.9)	<0.0001
Americas	52.4% (44.3 to 60.4; 17.0 to 86.5)	87.3%	14.9% (3.2 to 26.5)	0.012	9.1% (4.8 to 14.4; <0.0001 to 29.5)	69.8%	1.1% (-10.9 to 13.0)	0.86	5.6% (2.5 to 9.6; <0.0001 to 18.2)	50.8%	0.92% (-11.8 to 13.6)	0.89
African	1.2% (0.053 to 3.2; <0.0001 to 11.5)	63.3%	-35.2% (-48.0 to -22.3)	<0.0001	2.4% (<0.0001 to 8.0; <0.0001 to 30.9)	83.5%	-3.3% (-15.0 to 8.3)	0.57	0.0% (0.0 to 0.0; 0.0 to 0.0)	7.7%†	-5.3% (-16.7 to 6.2)	0.36
European region												
Europe (excluding Nordic countries)	37.4% (30.9 to 44.1; 0.60 to 87.7)	97.8%	1 (ref)	NA	9.3% (7.7 to 11.1; 1.9 to 20.8)	79.1%	1 (ref)	NA	5.1% (3.4 to 7.2; <0.0001 to 20.0)	87.5%	1 (ref)	NA
Nordic countries	39.8% (29.4 to 50.7; 3.0 to 85.6)	97.5%	0.40% (-12.2 to 13.0)	0.95	2.7 (0.64 to 5.8; <0.0001 to 14.8)	68.3%	-7.7% (-14.4 to -1.0)	0.025	0.96% (0.021 to 2.7; <0.0001 to 7.4)	40.7†	-4.8% (-11.9 to 2.3)	0.18
Source of recruitment												
Included STI clinics	49.0% (42.9 to 55.1; 3.8 to 95.4)	97.5%	1 (ref)	NA	17.1 (11.9 to 23.0; <0.0001 to 67.4)	97.1%	1 (ref)	NA	11.45 (6.6 to 17.1; <0.0001 to 61.5)	97.1%	1 (ref)	NA
Non-STI clinics or community	25.5% (19.2 to 32.3; <0.0001 to 80.0)	97.1%	-19.6% (-28.1 to -11.2)	<0.0001	9.1 (3.3 to 16.7; <0.0001 to 66.6)	97.1%	-5.78% (-15.6 to 4.1)	0.25	2.9% (0.67 to 6.3; <0.0001 to 28.3)	90.5%	-7.99% (-17.4 to 1.4)	0.095

Prevalence was defined as the proportion of *M genitalium*-positive specimens with single nucleotide polymorphisms in 23S rRNA gene for macrolide resistance and the *parC* gene for mutations associated with fluoroquinolone resistance. NA=not applicable. PI=prediction interval. *Regression coefficient multiplied by 100. †Non-significant I² value. All other I² values were significant (<0.032).

Table 2: Prevalence of macrolide, fluoroquinolone, and dual-class resistance in *Mycoplasma genitalium*, in subgroup and meta-regression analyses

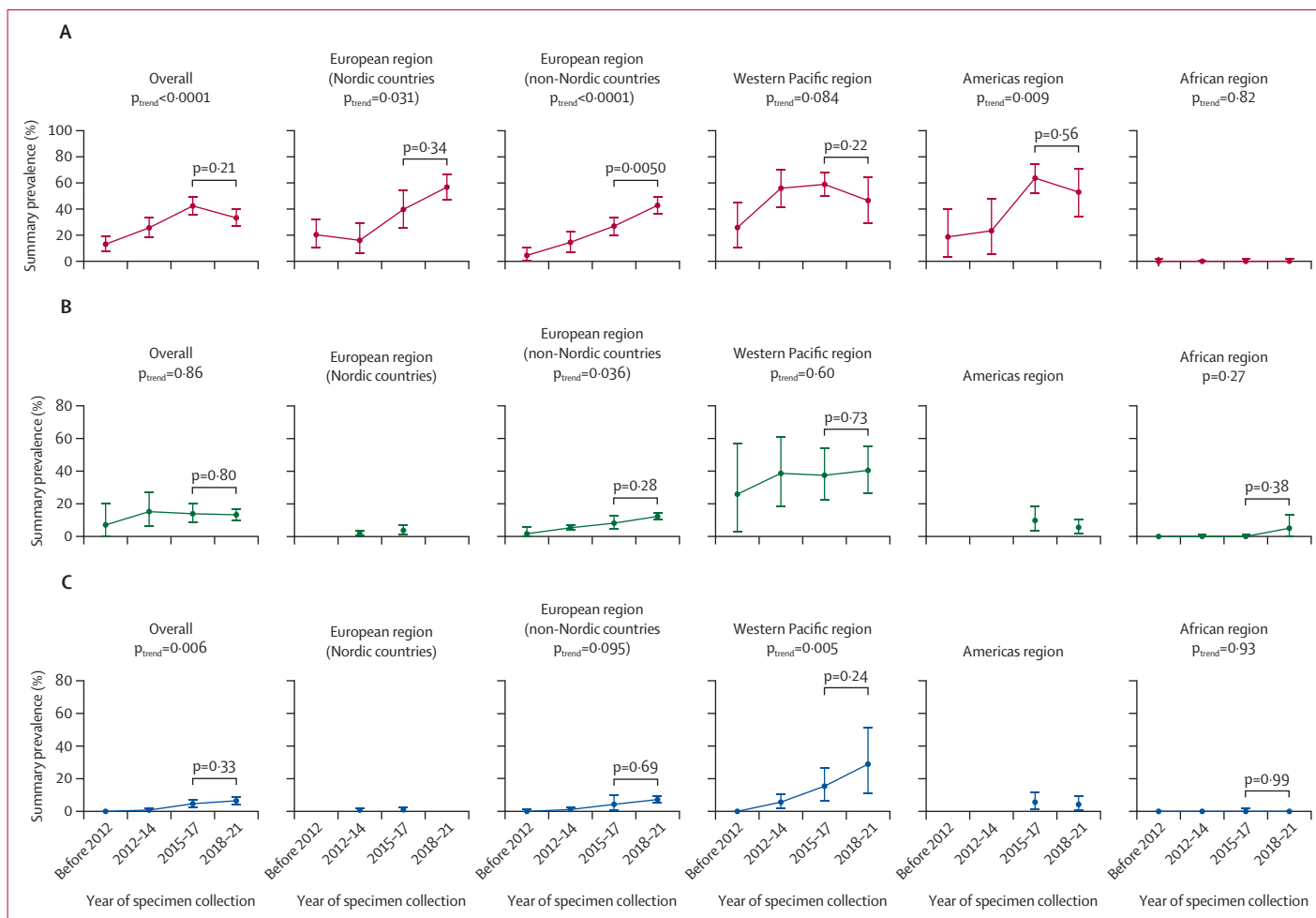


Figure 2: Prevalence of macrolide (A), fluoroquinolone (B), and dual-class (C) resistance in *Mycoplasma genitalium*, by year of specimen collection and WHO geographical region

Prevalence was defined as the proportion of *M genitalium*-positive specimens with single nucleotide polymorphisms in 23S rRNA gene for macrolide resistance and the *parC* gene for mutations associated with fluoroquinolone resistance. Error bars represent 95% CIs. A trend test in meta-regression across all time periods was performed by treating year of specimen collection as a continuous ordered categorical variable and the first time period as the reference category (ie, before 2012). P_{trends} could not be presented for fluoroquinolone resistance and dual-class resistance for the European Nordic and Americas regions due to limited data. Meta-regression was also restricted to the last two timepoints (2015–17 and 2018–21).

showing the highest levels (29.0% in 2018–21). The ParC S83I amino acid change was the most frequent ParC S83/D87 variant and increased in prevalence from 0.0% before 2012 to 7.3% in 2018–21. Men who have sex with men had higher prevalence of all classes of resistance in *M genitalium* compared with women and men who have sex with women.

The apparent stabilisation of macrolide resistance in some regions might be due to several factors. For instance, in the 2018–21 period, some WHO regions, such as the Americas, included the first published data from populations with very low levels of macrolide resistance (eg, female sex workers in Ecuador and women attending for STI screening in Guatemala).^{90,153,172} This situation is contrasted to Canada and the USA where macrolide resistance levels are higher, with a 2023 surveillance study from the USA observing a prevalence of 59% in their study population.¹⁷³ In the Western Pacific, where macrolide resistance was estimated at 46.5% in 2018–21, the observed stabilisation is likely to have been influenced by Australian data, which contributed

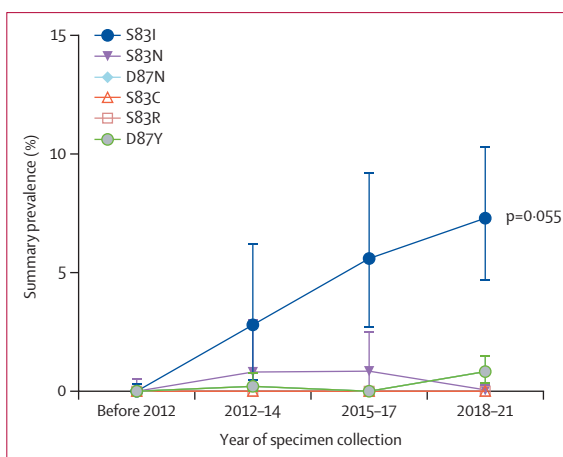


Figure 3: Prevalence of changes at S83 and D87 of ParC, by year of specimen collection Meta-regression p values for linear differences in the average prevalence between the subgroups for S83I is shown. All other p values ranged from 0.39 to 1.0.

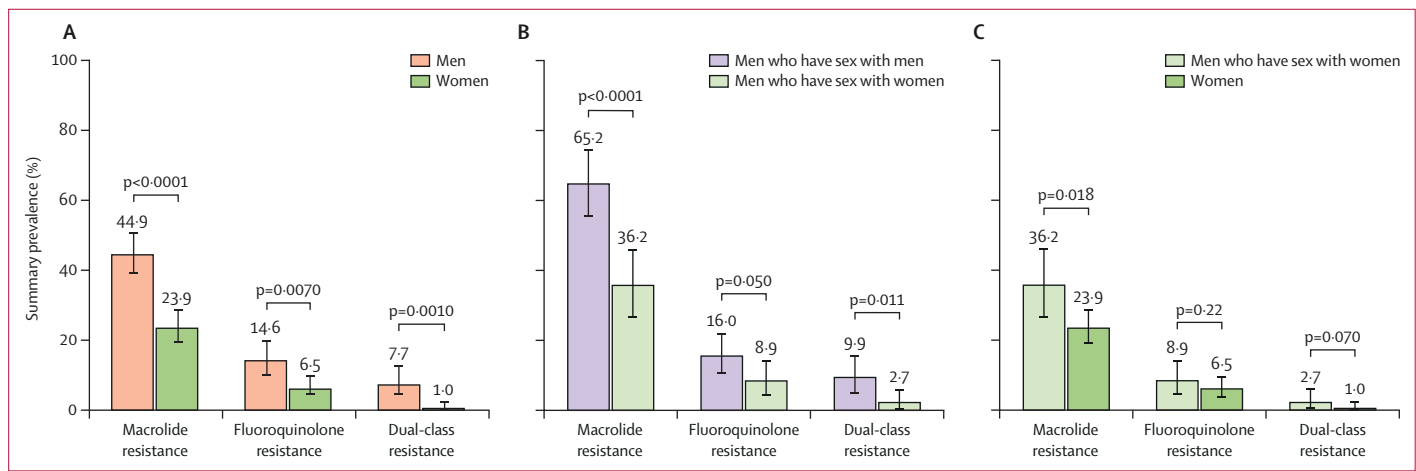


Figure 4: Prevalence of macrolide, fluoroquinolone, and dual-class resistance in *Mycoplasma genitalium*, by sex (A), sexual orientation (B), and between men who have sex with women and women (C) Prevalence was defined as the proportion of *Mycoplasma genitalium*-positive specimens with single nucleotide polymorphisms in 23S rRNA gene for macrolide resistance and the *parC* gene for mutations associated with fluoroquinolone resistance. Error bars represent 95% CIs. p values for meta-analysis subgroup effects are shown.

57% of the data in that region for that period. The apparent stabilisation of macrolide resistance in Australia from 2018 to 2021 might be linked to two recent national guideline changes made in 2017: first, recommending doxycycline over single-dose azithromycin for STI syndromes and rectal chlamydia infections¹⁷⁴ and second, introducing resistance-guided therapy for managing *M genitalium*.¹⁷⁵

Conversely, there were ongoing increases in macrolide resistance in Europe (20.4% before 2012 to 56.8% in 2018–21 in Nordic countries [$p_{\text{trend}}=0.031$], and 4.6% before 2012 to 43.2% in 2018–21 in non-Nordic countries [$p_{\text{trend}} < 0.0001$]; figure 2). Of note, in Sweden, where doxycycline is prescribed as first-line treatment for non-gonococcal urethritis (NGU) and chlamydial infections, lower macrolide resistance levels were reported (20% in 2015–17) compared with other Nordic and European countries, although the most recent prevalence estimate, published after our search date, was 31% in 2018.¹⁷⁶ Most European guidelines now recommend doxycycline for syndromic treatment of NGU or an extended dose of azithromycin if the patient has a macrolide-susceptible *M genitalium* infection.^{177,178} Hence, a decrease in resistance prevalence, as seen in other regions, might become evident in the near future. Another potential contributing factor to the increase in macrolide resistance in the European region in 2018–21 was the inclusion of studies for which the majority of samples were from men who have sex with men, who have a higher prevalence of resistant infections.^{33,140,144}

The highest burden of fluoroquinolone resistance was in the Western Pacific (40.5% in 2018–21). Australia reported a two-times increase (15.6% in 2015–17 to 34.5% in 2018–21) and in Japan, a five-times increase in resistance was observed (12.2% before 2012 to 64.9% in 2015–17). These patterns are probably related to the concurrent high prevalence of macrolide resistance, resulting in higher

consumption of fluoroquinolones. Based on available data, dual-class resistance was also high in this region (29.0% in 2018–21) compared with other regions, where prevalence was less than 7.3%. While lower than the Western Pacific, the European non-Nordic region had increases in fluoroquinolone resistance from 1.7% before 2012 to 12.3% in 2018–21, which is double the 5% estimate reported in a meta-analysis of *M genitalium* resistance in Europe before 2018.¹⁷⁹ Dual-class resistance also rose in this region, from 0.0% before 2012 to 7.3% in 2018–21. Given the increase in macrolide resistance in the European region, efforts need to be made to prevent the otherwise inevitable rapid rises in fluoroquinolone and dual-class resistance. The scarcity of effective antibiotics for the treatment of dual class-resistant *M genitalium* highlights the importance of restricting fluoroquinolone use where possible, and emphasises the need for exploring non-quinolone treatment regimens for *M genitalium*, whether through new antibiotics,¹⁸⁰ repurposing existing ones like minocycline,^{181–186} or combination therapies.^{185,187–189}

Compared with our earlier systematic review, this update includes more data from low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs), including Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Guatemala, Kenya, Mali, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Solomon Islands, and Togo,^{49,83,89,90,146,153,172} although this represented a small proportion (10%) of all samples. Of the available data, macrolide and fluoroquinolone resistance were generally low in these regions, probably due to the limited availability and use of antibiotics in many LMICs.¹⁹⁰ However, the implementation of mass drug administration of azithromycin to control and eliminate certain infectious diseases, such as trachoma in some LMICs, might exert considerable pressure on the selection of macrolide resistance. It will be important to monitor the impact of these programmes on resistance through surveillance. An additional influence on the macrolide resistance estimates in LMICs is the number of recent studies

performed in populations with low risk of resistance, such as pregnant women.^{119,121,128,146} Since our search, additional data from Brazil, Taiwan, India, Madagascar, and Viet Nam have been made available, but more data from LMICs are needed.^{191–195}

To our knowledge, we reported for the first time trends in specific ParC S83 and D87 amino acid changes in *M genitalium*. The ParC S83I amino acid change was the most common and increased over time from 0.0% before 2012 to 7.3% in 2018–21. Published data show that this alteration is the dominant mutation driving fluoroquinolone treatment failure in countries like Australia,^{8,9,189} and this increase, although not statistically significant, suggests that it might carry a lower fitness burden compared with other ParC changes. Published studies have also shown that a concurrent GyrA M95I amino acid change doubles the risk of fluoroquinolone failure compared with the ParC S83I change alone.^{6–10,189} Unfortunately, there were insufficient published data to analyse trends in GyrA amino acid changes over time, but based on data from the Western Pacific, GyrA changes are commonly observed with a ParC change.^{8,9}

When stratifying resistance by sex, the prevalence of all resistance mutations was higher among men than women, and men who have sex with men had a higher prevalence of resistance compared with men who have sex with women. The differences in resistance between men and women is probably due to the high prevalence of resistance in men who have sex with men. Overall, men who have sex with men have higher levels of antibiotic use compared with the general population, which has been attributed to higher rates of STI screening, detection and treatment, and high-density sexual networks, facilitating rapid spread of resistant infections, making *M genitalium* infections within this group increasingly challenging to cure.^{196–198}

The study has several limitations. First, the overall summary estimates should be interpreted with caution and not be construed as representative of the entire region or country, since data availability differed among countries, time periods, and specific study populations. As discussed, regional and time-trend estimates might be skewed, as certain countries contributed data only at specific time-points, and some countries had data only from sub-populations with differing risks. Aside from one study from Morocco, studies from the WHO Eastern Mediterranean and South-East Asia regions were lacking from our search results. More data from these regions are required to understand the global burden of antibiotic-resistant *M genitalium*. Second, most studies were conducted in sexual health clinics, limiting the generalisability of our findings beyond high-risk groups. Third, we did not analyse the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sampling or study results. The progression and impact of the pandemic varied in speed and magnitude across different countries. This would have impacted health-seeking behaviour and testing practices. Fourth, we have included four S83 and two D87 ParC amino acid changes although the role of some of these

ParC amino acid changes in fluoroquinolone treatment failure has not yet been confirmed. Finally, there was substantial heterogeneity, which was most likely due to real differences in prevalence due to time period, geographical location, source of recruitment, and populations sampled, as seen in most prevalence meta-analyses.¹⁴ To better understand risk factors associated with *M genitalium* resistance, studies should consistently report data stratified by variables such as symptom, HIV status, and age, where feasible.

Although additional global and regional data are now available to provide more accurate estimates of trends, data incorporating additional countries and populations are required to provide a comprehensive understanding of contemporary antibiotic resistance in *M genitalium*. Pilot surveillance studies in the UK, the USA, and Australia have recently provided such data.^{69,173,199} However, antibiotic resistance data are also routinely generated by resistance assays that are now recommended by most international guidelines to optimise antibiotic use and cure for *M genitalium*. This provides an important opportunity for countries to collate these routine data and generate sustainable surveillance for antimicrobial resistance in *M genitalium*. As quinolone resistance assays become increasingly relevant to clinical care, these data will also be more frequently available within services. Existing gonococcal surveillance systems can also be leveraged for *M genitalium* surveillance, ideally using standardised collection and testing protocols, to maximise comparability across countries and to inform regional specific guidelines. *M genitalium* is the first STI where treatment limiting antimicrobial resistance is increasingly impacting on cure. Strategies to improve antibiotic misuse and overuse including routine use of resistance assays and avoidance of asymptomatic screening are needed to curb further rises.

Contributors

DAM, T-PC, LAV, JSJ, MU, NL, and CSB designed the study, which was conceived by DAM and CSB. T-PC and LAV performed the systematic search. T-PC and LAV extracted the data. T-PC synthesised the data with assistance from DAM, CSB, LAV, and NL. T-PC, LAV, CSB, and DAM drafted the Article, with assistance from GLM, ELP, JSJ, MU, EPFC, NL, DMW, ELS, JSH, JAD, SMG, CKF, and LZ. T-PC, LAV, DAM, and CSB had access to and verified the data, and were responsible for the decision to submit the manuscript.

Declaration of interests

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Data sharing

Data used in this study are available upon request to the corresponding authors.

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