

## Antimicrobial Stewardship Programs and Antibiotic Resistance Control: The Mediating Role of Clinical Compliance and Institutional Policy

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### Abstract

*Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has emerged as a major global health threat, resulting in increased morbidity, mortality, and healthcare costs. Inappropriate and excessive use of antibiotics in healthcare settings is a key driver of antibiotic resistance, highlighting the urgent need for effective control strategies. Antimicrobial stewardship programs (ASPs) are evidence-based interventions designed to optimize the use of antimicrobials, improve patient outcomes, and reduce the development of antibiotic resistance. These programs include clinical guidelines, prescription audits, feedback mechanisms, and educational initiatives for healthcare professionals. Despite their potential, the effectiveness of ASPs often depends on mediating factors such as clinical compliance and institutional policy support. Clinical compliance refers to the adherence of healthcare professionals to established stewardship guidelines, while institutional policies represent the structural and regulatory support provided by healthcare organizations to facilitate appropriate antibiotic use. This study investigates the impact of antimicrobial stewardship programs on antibiotic resistance control while examining the mediating roles of clinical compliance and institutional policy. A quantitative research design was adopted, with data collected through structured questionnaires administered to healthcare professionals, including physicians, pharmacists, and infection control staff in hospitals. Structural equation modeling using Smart PLS was employed to analyze the relationships between ASP implementation, clinical compliance, institutional policy, and outcomes in antibiotic resistance control. The results demonstrate that antimicrobial stewardship programs significantly reduce antibiotic resistance. Clinical compliance and institutional policy partially mediate this relationship, indicating that the effectiveness of ASPs is enhanced when healthcare professionals adhere to guidelines and institutions provide robust policy support. The findings underscore the importance of combining behavioral, organizational, and structural interventions to maximize the success of ASPs. This research contributes to the growing literature on antimicrobial stewardship and provides practical insights for healthcare administrators and policymakers to implement effective programs for antibiotic resistance control.*

**Keywords:** *Antimicrobial Stewardship Programs, Antibiotic Resistance Control, Clinical Compliance, Institutional Policy, Healthcare Governance*

### Introduction

Antimicrobial resistance has become one of the most pressing challenges in modern healthcare, threatening the efficacy of antibiotics and compromising patient safety. Globally, antibiotic resistance leads to longer hospital stays, higher medical costs, and increased mortality rates. The overuse and misuse of antibiotics are primary contributors to the emergence and spread of resistant pathogens in healthcare and community settings. Healthcare institutions have recognized the need for systematic approaches to optimize antibiotic use and mitigate resistance, resulting in the development of antimicrobial stewardship programs (ASPs) (Dyar et al., 2020).

ASPs are coordinated interventions designed to improve antimicrobial prescribing practices by ensuring the selection of appropriate drugs, doses, routes, and durations of therapy. Core components of ASPs

include the establishment of clinical guidelines, prospective audit and feedback, formulary restrictions, provider education, and performance monitoring (Baur et al., 2017). These programs aim to enhance patient outcomes, prevent the emergence of multidrug-resistant organisms, and reduce healthcare costs associated with unnecessary or inappropriate antibiotic use. Effective implementation of ASPs requires the engagement of multidisciplinary teams including infectious disease specialists, pharmacists, microbiologists, and infection control personnel.

While the theoretical benefits of ASPs are well documented, their effectiveness in practice is influenced by behavioral and organizational factors. Clinical compliance, or adherence to recommended antibiotic prescribing guidelines, is a critical determinant of program success. Healthcare professionals may deviate from established protocols due to diagnostic uncertainty, time pressures, or lack of awareness about current resistance patterns (Pulcini et al., 2019). Without high levels of compliance, ASPs may fail to achieve desired outcomes in antibiotic resistance control.

Institutional policy constitutes another key factor in determining ASP effectiveness. Policy support involves administrative commitment, resource allocation, monitoring infrastructure, and regulatory frameworks that enable healthcare providers to follow stewardship guidelines. Hospitals with strong institutional policies are better equipped to enforce prescription standards, conduct regular audits, and incentivize appropriate antimicrobial use (Broom et al., 2020). Institutional backing also ensures that ASPs are sustainable and scalable across different healthcare settings.

Antibiotic resistance control requires a multifaceted approach that integrates stewardship programs, behavioral adherence, and organizational support. Prior research has largely focused on evaluating the direct impact of ASPs on resistance outcomes, yet the mediating mechanisms that facilitate this relationship remain underexplored. Understanding how clinical compliance and institutional policy mediate the effectiveness of ASPs is essential for optimizing program design and implementation.

The current study addresses this research gap by proposing a conceptual framework in which ASPs influence antibiotic resistance control through the mediating roles of clinical compliance and institutional policy. By employing structural equation modeling using Smart PLS, this study quantitatively examines the strength and significance of these relationships in hospital settings. The findings provide empirical evidence regarding the behavioral and organizational factors that enhance ASP effectiveness, offering practical implications for healthcare administrators and policymakers.

## Literature Review

Antimicrobial stewardship programs are increasingly recognized as critical interventions for controlling antibiotic resistance. According to Baur et al. (2017), ASPs significantly reduce unnecessary antibiotic use and contribute to lower rates of resistant infections. The World Health Organization emphasizes the global importance of stewardship programs in healthcare systems, particularly in regions with high rates of antibiotic misuse (WHO, 2021). These programs encompass multiple components, including clinical guideline development, prospective audits, feedback systems, restriction policies, and educational activities for healthcare professionals.

Clinical compliance is a crucial factor for the success of ASPs. Compliance refers to the extent to which healthcare providers adhere to recommended prescribing guidelines. Studies have shown that deviations from protocol, including unnecessary broad-spectrum antibiotic use or inappropriate therapy durations, can undermine the effectiveness of stewardship initiatives (Pulcini et al., 2019). Behavioral factors influencing

compliance include provider knowledge, attitudes toward resistance, and perceived workload (Charani et al., 2020). Educational interventions, audit and feedback mechanisms, and clinical decision support systems have been shown to improve compliance and optimize prescribing practices.

Institutional policy support plays a significant role in sustaining ASP effectiveness. Hospitals with strong policy frameworks provide resources for stewardship activities, such as dedicated personnel, data monitoring infrastructure, and administrative backing for guideline enforcement (Broom et al., 2020). Policy interventions may include formulary restrictions, mandatory pre-authorization for certain antibiotics, and performance evaluation tied to antimicrobial prescribing behaviors. The integration of institutional policies ensures that ASPs are not only implemented but also maintained over time, reducing variability in compliance and outcomes.

The relationship between ASPs, clinical compliance, institutional policy, and antibiotic resistance control has been explored in multiple studies. Dyar et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review highlighting that hospitals with comprehensive stewardship programs and high compliance rates achieved significant reductions in antibiotic-resistant infections. Similarly, studies have shown that policy support moderates the effectiveness of ASPs, with hospitals providing robust administrative and regulatory frameworks achieving superior outcomes in resistance control (Schuts et al., 2016). However, few studies have simultaneously examined both clinical compliance and institutional policy as mediators within a single model.

Antibiotic resistance control is a multidimensional outcome encompassing reduced incidence of resistant infections, optimized antibiotic consumption, and improved patient outcomes. Stewardship programs achieve these outcomes by promoting rational prescribing, limiting unnecessary antibiotic exposure, and fostering a culture of responsible antimicrobial use (Baur et al., 2017). Clinical compliance enhances the fidelity of program implementation, while institutional policy provides structural reinforcement for sustained adherence. Together, these mediating factors strengthen the impact of ASPs on resistance control.

Theoretical frameworks such as the Knowledge-Attitude-Practice model and Organizational Behavior theory provide insights into the mechanisms underlying ASP effectiveness. The Knowledge-Attitude-Practice model emphasizes that provider knowledge and attitudes influence clinical behavior, affecting compliance with stewardship protocols. Organizational Behavior theory underscores the role of institutional structures, policies, and culture in shaping individual behaviors and facilitating program adoption (Charani et al., 2020). By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study conceptualizes ASPs as organizational interventions whose success depends on both behavioral and structural mediators.

In summary, the literature indicates that ASPs are essential for combating antibiotic resistance but their effectiveness depends on clinical compliance and institutional policy support. High compliance ensures that providers follow evidence-based guidelines, while strong policy frameworks enable monitoring, enforcement, and resource allocation. Despite the recognized importance of these factors, empirical research examining their mediating roles within a unified model remains limited. This study addresses this gap by using structural equation modeling to investigate the mechanisms through which ASPs influence antibiotic resistance control, providing practical guidance for healthcare organizations seeking to optimize stewardship programs.

## Conceptual Model and Theoretical Framework

### Conceptual Model:

- Antimicrobial Stewardship Programs (ASP) → Antibiotic Resistance Control (ARC)
- Mediators: Clinical Compliance (CC), Institutional Policy (IP)

### Theoretical Framework:

- Knowledge-Attitude-Practice (KAP) Model
- Organizational Behavior Theory

### Hypotheses:

H1: ASP positively influences ARC

H2: ASP positively influences CC

H3: ASP positively influences IP

H4: CC positively influences ARC

H5: IP positively influences ARC

H6: CC mediates the relationship between ASP and ARC

H7: IP mediates the relationship between ASP and ARC

### Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationships between ASPs, clinical compliance, institutional policy, and antibiotic resistance control. The target population consisted of healthcare professionals, including physicians, pharmacists, and infection control staff, in hospitals implementing ASPs. A structured questionnaire was developed using validated measurement items adapted from prior research (Baur et al., 2017; Pulcini et al., 2019). All constructs were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Data collection was conducted online and via hospital survey distribution. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed, and 295 valid responses were retained after screening for completeness. The sample included professionals from multiple hospital types and regions to ensure generalizability. Demographic characteristics such as profession, years of experience, and hospital type were collected.

Data analysis was conducted using Smart PLS structural equation modeling. The measurement model was assessed for reliability and validity using Cronbach alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted. The structural model evaluated hypothesized relationships using path coefficients and bootstrapping with 5000 resamples. Mediation analysis was conducted to examine the indirect effects of clinical compliance and institutional policy between ASPs and antibiotic resistance control. This approach allows simultaneous testing of complex relationships and provides robust insights into the mechanisms underlying stewardship program effectiveness.

## Results

### Measurement Model Results

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
ASP	0.91	0.94	0.72
Clinical Compliance	0.88	0.91	0.67
Institutional Policy	0.90	0.93	0.70
Antibiotic Resistance Control	0.89	0.92	0.68

## Interpretation

The measurement model assessment evaluates the reliability and validity of the constructs in the study. Cronbach alpha values for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency. ASP demonstrated a Cronbach alpha of 0.91, reflecting high reliability in measuring program implementation, guidelines, and interventions. Clinical compliance had a value of 0.88, confirming the consistency of items assessing adherence to guidelines. Institutional policy yielded 0.90, showing strong reliability for items assessing administrative and regulatory support. Antibiotic resistance control also showed high reliability (0.89), demonstrating consistent measurement of resistance reduction and optimized antibiotic use.

Composite reliability values ranged from 0.91 to 0.94, further confirming internal consistency across constructs. Average variance extracted (AVE) values for all constructs were above 0.60, exceeding the minimum recommended value of 0.50 and confirming convergent validity. ASP achieved an AVE of 0.72, clinical compliance 0.67, institutional policy 0.70, and antibiotic resistance control 0.68, indicating that a substantial proportion of item variance is explained by the underlying constructs. These results validate that the measurement model provides a reliable and valid foundation for testing the structural relationships and mediating mechanisms in the study.

## Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient	T value	P value	Result
H1	ASP → ARC	0.48	7.92	0.000	Supported
H2	ASP → CC	0.61	10.21	0.000	Supported
H3	ASP → IP	0.57	9.78	0.000	Supported
H4	CC → ARC	0.35	6.11	0.000	Supported
H5	IP → ARC	0.38	6.44	0.000	Supported

## Interpretation

The structural model results demonstrate that antimicrobial stewardship programs positively influence antibiotic resistance control, supporting H1. The path coefficient of 0.48 indicates a moderately strong effect, suggesting that effective implementation of ASPs directly contributes to reduced antibiotic resistance. ASPs also significantly influence clinical compliance (H2) with a coefficient of 0.61 and institutional policy (H3) with a coefficient of 0.57, demonstrating that program implementation strengthens adherence and organizational support.

Clinical compliance positively affects antibiotic resistance control (H4), with a path coefficient of 0.35, confirming that adherence to guidelines mediates the impact of ASPs. Institutional policy also has a significant positive effect on resistance control (H5), with a coefficient of 0.38, indicating that policy support enhances the program's outcomes. Mediation analysis (not shown in the table) revealed partial mediation of ASP effects on antibiotic resistance control through both clinical compliance and institutional policy, highlighting the importance of behavioral and structural mechanisms in maximizing program effectiveness.

## Conclusion and Discussion

This study demonstrates that antimicrobial stewardship programs significantly reduce antibiotic resistance in hospital settings. Clinical compliance and institutional policy partially mediate this relationship, indicating that the effectiveness of ASPs is strengthened when healthcare professionals adhere to guidelines and institutions provide strong policy support. The findings underscore the importance of combining

behavioral, organizational, and structural interventions to maximize stewardship outcomes.

From a practical perspective, healthcare administrators should prioritize strategies that enhance clinical compliance, such as regular audits, feedback, and educational programs. Strengthening institutional policies, including administrative support, resource allocation, and enforcement of guidelines, is critical for sustaining ASP effectiveness. Together, these measures can create an environment conducive to rational antibiotic use and effective resistance control.

Theoretically, this study integrates Knowledge-Attitude-Practice and Organizational Behavior theories to explain how behavioral adherence and policy frameworks mediate the relationship between ASPs and resistance control. These findings contribute to the literature by providing empirical evidence on the mechanisms that drive successful antimicrobial stewardship programs.

### Future Recommendations

Future research should examine longitudinal effects of ASPs on resistance trends and explore additional moderating factors such as hospital size, regional policies, and digital decision support tools. Multi-country studies could provide cross-cultural insights into program effectiveness and inform global stewardship strategies.

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