

## Research Article

# Assessing the diversity of macroinvertebrates communities and their relationship with environmental factors in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman

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### Abstract

Marine benthic macrofauna plays an important role in ecosystem processes in the marine benthic zone. This study aims to investigate the biodiversity pattern and identifying benthic macroinvertebrates in the coastal zones of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Two sampling periods were performed in this study; the first: from November 2018 to January 2019 and the second: from December 2019 to January 2020. Sampling was carried out at 19 sites with three replicates (171 samples). A total of 164 species belonging to 85 families and 31 orders were identified. The most abundant families were Ampeliscidae and Apeudidae with mean values of  $19.5 \pm 42$  and  $11.1 \pm 18$  in  $m^2$ , respectively. The most abundant class were Malacostraca and Polychaeta. The family Nephtyidae with eight identified species was the most in all stations. *Amphipholis squamata*, *Byblis* sp., *Capitella capitata*, and *Amphioplus* sp. were the significant species that contributed to the differentiation between stations. Furthermore, according to CCA analysis, dissolved oxygen (DO) showed a strong direct relationship with Callianassidae, Anthuridae, Paraonidae, Maeridae, and Corophiidae. Also, a strong indirect relationship was found between Haminoeidae and DO. Turbidity showed a strong direct relationship with Flabelligeridae and as well as weak direct with Cirratulidae. Furthermore, chlorophyll-a showed a strong direct relationship with Nereididae, and other parameters showed a medium direct relationship with Maldanidae and Haminoeidae. The Composition of bed sediment was also showed a strong relationship with macroinvertebrates communities in the study area. The diverse health status was not totally in a good condition and needs to be improved. These findings could be applied in further studies for habitat management and monitoring programs.

**Keywords:** Macroinvertebrate assemblages, Diversity index, Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman

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## Introduction

Marine benthic macrofauna plays an important role in ecosystem processes such as dispersion and burial, pollutant metabolism, nutrient cycling, and secondary production (Snelgrove, 1998). Although biomass and diversity of benthic macroinvertebrates represent a temporal and seasonal pattern, they are employed as aquatic ecosystem health indicators (Marques *et al.*, 2009). Benthic macroinvertebrates react to anthropogenic disturbances and natural changes such as temperature, pH, DO, and pollution in their habitats in different ways (Saghali *et al.*, 2013; Gerami *et al.*, 2016). Climate change affected the marine ecosystem and the complexity of the food webs (Schofield *et al.*, 2010). Increased global average temperature, declining aquatic oxygen concentrations, and changes in wind strength are the main factors that impact the behavior of ocean currents behavior, leading to changes in the distribution and abundance of marine ecosystems (Hoegh-Guldberg and Bruno, 2010). Fluctuation in the diversity pattern of marine macroinvertebrates as marine food web secondary production can affect trophic networks and cause complex changes to trophic relationships (Nordström and Bonsdorff, 2017).

Environmental variables at multiple scales affected the diversity and density of macroinvertebrates communities differently (Townsend *et al.*, 1983). Therefore, it is essential to study their relationship spatially and temporally to develop our understanding of marine

ecosystems. A better understanding of macroinvertebrates-environmental variables relation increases the accuracy and precision of macroinvertebrate-based bioassessment (Li *et al.*, 2012). Many studies have been reported the effect of environmental variables on marine benthic communities around the world (Teske and Wooldridge, 2004; Gamboa-García *et al.*, 2018; Xu *et al.*, 2019; Wu *et al.*, 2019; Alsaffar *et al.*, 2020; Patang and Soegianto, 2020). However, data about the status of marine macroinvertebrate communities of the Persian Gulf is limited especially at the species level and scant information is available to address how environmental variables influence macroinvertebrate communities in the Persian Gulf. Gerami *et al.* (2016) studied spatial and temporal variation of macroinvertebrates in the shrimp fishing grounds of the Hormozgan waters and reported the seasonal variation of 19 macroinvertebrate orders. Hajializadeh *et al.* (2020) investigated microbenthic species diversity and their biological trait patterns in mangrove-associated habitats of Hormozgan province waters and reported total of 122 macrofauna taxa in their study. They declared that deposit-feeding, crawlers, medium-size, and free-living were the dominant trait modalities in all habitats. Azizi *et al.* (2020) studied macrobenthic fauna in rocky habitats of Bushehr province coastal waters and reported total of 66 taxa in all studied stations. They indicated that mollusks were abundant in all three sites and Portunid crabs and

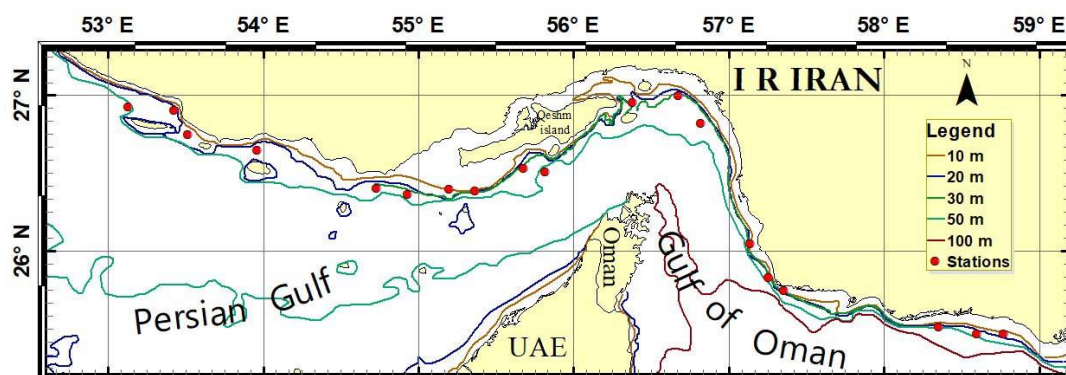
Polychaets were the lowest abundant groups. Kosari *et al.* (2021) conducted a study on identification of macrobenthos in the Yekshabe Estuary in the Persian Gulf and reported 80 species. They found that Polychaeta was the dominant group in all stations and there was no significant difference between species richness in all stations.

The objectives of this study were (i) to investigate the influence of the most important environmental variables on macroinvertebrates; (ii) to identify and evaluate the diversity of macroinvertebrates, and (iii) assess the relationship between the composition of bed sediment and macroinvertebrates

communities. The results of this study could be used in the monitoring of marine species habitat health and assessing the productivity of the marine food web.

### Materials and methods

Two sampling periods were performed in this study. The first period started from November 2018 to January 2019, and the second period from December 2019 to January 2020. Sampling started from station one in North-West coastal waters of the Hormozgan Province and continued to station 19 to the east up to coastal waters of Sistan and Balouchistan Province (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1: Locations of sampling sites in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, Iran (2018-2020).**

The vessel R / V Ferdows-1 was used which was equipped with GPS. Sampling stations were selected randomly to cover most coastal waters of Hormozgan province coastal waters. Sampling depths were varied between 10 to 50 meters. Three replicate samples of macroinvertebrates per station (171 samples) were covered in the study period. Sampling was carried out by Van Veen grab with a 0.0256 m<sup>2</sup>

cross section. Physicochemical properties of water were measured by CTD including Temperature (°C), Conductivity (ms/cm), Salinity (ppm), DO (g/L), pH, Chlorophyll-a (mg/L), and Turbidity. Samples were sieved through 0.5 mm mesh. The remained samples were fixed with 97% ethanol and transferred to the laboratory. Most illustrated keys such as Naderloo (2017); Al- Yamani *et al.* (2012);

Debruyne (2003); Fauchald (1997); Bosch *et al.* (1995) and Sterrer (1986) were used to identify macroinvertebrates up to species level.

In order to compare biodiversity between sampling sites and the health status, the Shannon-Wiener Index (Shannon and Wiener, 1948) was used. The algorithm was:

$$H' = - \sum P_i \log_2 P_i$$

Where:  $P_i$  is the proportion of individuals belonging to species  $i$  in the sample. The Shannon-Wiener index usually varies between 0 to 5 (Marques *et al.*, 2009). However, Molvær *et al.* (1997) introduced a classification table for assessing habitat health status based on the Shannon-Wiener index (Table 1).

**Table 1: Categories considered as a function of Shannon-Wiener Index values.**

Shannon-Wiener index	Shannon-Wiener value
High status	>4 bits/individual
Good status	3-4 bits/individual
Moderate status	2-3 bits/ individual
Poor status	1-2 bits/ individual
Bad status	0-1 bit / individual

Margalef Index (Margalef, 1969) was also employed to quantify the diversity of identified species in the study area.

The formula was:

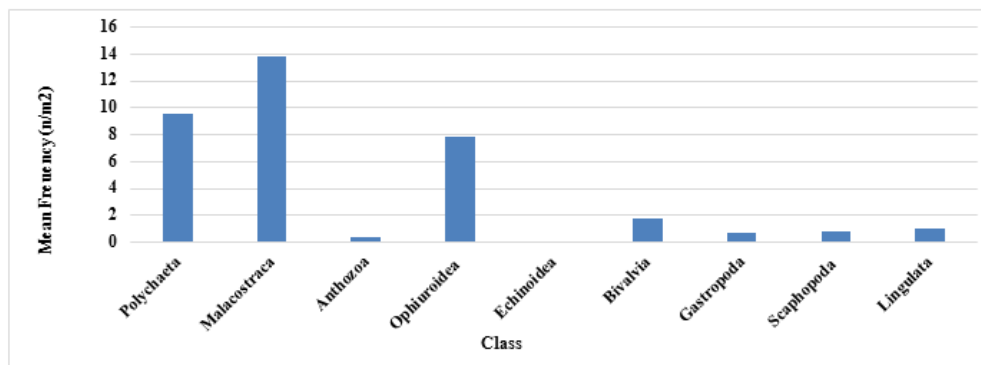
$$D = \frac{(S - 1)}{\log_e N}$$

Where  $S$  = number of species and  $N$  = total number of individuals. Margalef Index values below four identified as typical of polluted areas (Ros and Cardell, 1991). The Composition of bed

sediment aggregation was measured through a method explained by Buchannan (1984) and the percent of total organic matter was also calculated by method Holme and McIntyre (1984). In order to assess the similarity between stations and founding significant discriminant species SIMPER analysis preformed. Significant differences between stations were analyzed through the PERMANOVA method. Canonical correspondence analysis (CCA) was applied to extract major gradients among combinations of macrobenthic assemblages and environmental variables. Principal component analysis (PCA) was performed to find the main component before CCA analysis. The analysis of similarities (ANOSIM) was used to examine the spatial patterns of macroinvertebrate assemblages. For parametric analyses, the abundance data were square-root transformed to reduce heteroscedasticity before running the similarity matrix. All the analyses were carried out with R statistical packages and a vegan package was used to run analysis (Oksanen *et al.*, 2015).

## Results

The results showed that a total of 164 species were identified in all sites, belonging to 85 families and 31 orders. The most abundant families were Ampeliscidae and Apseudidae with mean values of  $19.5 \pm 42$  (n/m<sup>2</sup>) and  $11.1 \pm 18$  numbers in square meter in all stations, respectively. In addition, the most abundant class was Malacostraca and Polychaeta, respectively (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2: Mean abundance of benthic macroinvertebrates of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman (2018-2020).**

The most diverse family was all stations (Table 2).  
Nephtyidae with 8 identified species in

**Table 2: Identified macroinvertebrates in all sampling sites of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman (2018-2020)**

Species	Family	Suborder	Order	Subclass	Class	Phylum
<i>Magelona longicornis</i> Johnson, 1901	Magelonidae		Canalipalata	Polychaeta incertae sedis	Polychaeta	Annelida
<i>Owenia fusiformis</i> Delle Chiaje, 1844	Oweniidae					
<i>Maldane cristata</i> Treadwell, 1923	Maldanidae			Sedentaria		
<i>Praxillella gracilis</i> (M. Sars, 1861)						
<i>Clymenella torquata</i> (Leidy, 1855)						
<i>Aricidea (Aricidea)</i> <i>wassi</i> Pettibone, 1965	Paraonidae					
<i>Aricidea</i> <i>longobranchiata</i> Day, 1961						
<i>Aricidea (Acmira)</i> <i>assimilis</i> Tebble, 1959						
<i>Leodamas chevalieri</i> (Fauvel, 1902)	Orbiniidae					
<i>Orbiniella</i> sp. Day, 1954						
<i>Orbinia</i> sp. Quatrefages, 1866						
<i>Ophelia</i> sp. Savigny, 1822	Opheliidae					
<i>Ophelina acuminata</i> Örsted, 1843						
<i>Ophelina</i> <i>cylindricaudata</i> (Hansen, 1879)						
<i>Capitella capitata</i> (Fabricius, 1780)	Capitellidae					
<i>Capitella</i> sp.1 Blainville, 1828						

**Table 2 (continued):**

Species	Family	Suborder	Order	Subclass	Class	Phylum
<i>Capitella</i> sp.2 Blainville, 1828						
<i>Rashgua rubrocincta</i> Wesenberg-Lund, 1949						
<i>Cossura laeviseta</i> Hartmann-Schröder, 1962	Cossuridae					
<i>Cossura longocirrata</i> Webster & Benedict, 1887						
<i>Cossura pygodactylata</i> Jones, 1956						
<i>Cossura</i> sp. Webster & Benedict, 1887						
<i>Cirrophorus</i> sp. Ehlers, 1908	Paraonidae					
<i>Poecilochaetus serpens</i> Allen, 1904	Poecilochaetidae	Spioniformia	Spionida			
<i>Paraprionospio pinnata</i> (Ehlers, 1901)	Spionidae					
<i>Prionospio rotalis</i> Mohammad, 1970						
<i>Scolelepis bonnieri</i> (Mesnil, 1896)						
Genus sp.1						
<i>Acrocirrus</i> sp. Grube, 1873	Acrocirridae	Cirratuliformia	Terebellida			
<i>Amage auricula</i> Malmgren, 1866	Ampharetidae					
<i>Amphicteis</i> sp. Grube, 1850						
<i>Samythopsis grubei</i> McIntosh, 1885						
<i>Chaetozone corona</i> Berkeley & Berkeley, 1941	Cirratulidae					
<i>Chaetozone</i> sp. Malmgren, 1867						
<i>Cirriformia tentaculata</i> (Montagu, 1808)						
<i>Tharyx</i> sp. Webster & Benedict, 1887						
<i>Brada incrustata</i> Støp-Bowitz, 1948	Flabelligeridae					
<i>Brada</i> sp. Stimpson, 1853						
<i>Diplocirrus glaucus</i> (Malmgren, 1867)						
<i>Pherusa plumosa</i> (Müller, 1776)						
<i>Sternaspis scutata</i> (Ranzani, 1817)	Sternaspidae					
<i>Pista brevibranchiata</i> Moore, 1923	Terebellidae	Terebelliformia				
<i>Pista</i> sp. Malmgren, 1866						
<i>Terebella</i> sp. Linnaeus, 1767						

**Table 2 (continued):**

Species	Family	Suborder	Order	Subclass	Class	Phylum
<i>Loimia</i> sp. Malmgren, 1866						
<i>Terebellides stroemii</i> Sars, 1835	Trichobranchidae					
<i>Branchiomma</i> sp. Kölliker, 1858	Trichobranchidae		Sabellida			
<i>Parasabella aberrans</i> (Augener, 1926)						
<i>Sabella</i> sp. Linnaeus, 1767						
<i>Bhawania goodie</i> Webster, 1884	Chrysopetalidae	Nereidiformia	Phyllodocida	Errantia		
<i>Chrysopetalum</i> sp. Ehlers, 1864						
<i>Syllis cornuta</i> Rathke, 1843	Chrysopetalidae					
<i>Hediste diversicolor</i> (O.F. Müller, 1776)	Nereididae					
<i>Leonnates indicus</i> Kinberg, 1865						
<i>Perinereis aibuhitensis</i> (Grube, 1878)						
<i>Perinereis nigropunctata</i> (Horst ,1889)						
<i>Perinereis</i> sp. Kinberg, 1865						
<i>Ancistrosyllis</i> sp. McIntosh, 1878	Pilargidae					
<i>Sigambra tentaculata</i> (Treadwell, 1941)						
<i>Sirsoe methanicola</i> (Desbruyeres & Toulmond, 1998)	Hesionidae					
<i>Glycera amboinensis</i> McIntosh, 1885	Glyceridae	Glyceriformia				
<i>Glycera capitata</i> Örsted, 1843						
<i>Glycera</i> sp1. Lamarck, 1818						
<i>Glycera</i> sp2. Lamarck, 1818						
<i>Glycera tridactyla</i> Schmarda, 1861						
<i>Glycera unicornis</i> Lamarck, 1818						
<i>Glycinde bonhourei</i> Gravier, 1904	Goniadidae					
<i>Glycinde</i> sp. Müller, 1858						
<i>Aglaophamus</i> sp. Kinberg, 1866	Nephtyidae		Phyllodocida incertae sedis			
<i>Micronephtys sphaerocirrata</i> (Wesenberg-Lund, 1949)						
<i>Nephtys californiensis</i> Hartman, 1938						
<i>Nephtys cirrosa</i> Ehlers, 1868						

**Table 2 (continued):**

Species	Family	Suborder	Order	Subclass	Class	Phylum
<i>Micronephthys cornuta</i> (Berkeley & Berkeley, 1945)						
<i>Nephtys glabra</i> Hartman, 1950						
<i>Nephtys</i> sp. Cuvier, 1817						
<i>Nephtys tulearensis</i> Fauvel, 1919						
<i>Eteone</i> sp. Savigny, 1822	Phyllodocidae	Phyllodociformia				
<i>Harmothoe dictyophora</i> (Grube, 1878)	Polynoidae	Aphroditiformia				
<i>Harmothoe</i> sp. Kinberg, 1856						
<i>Euthalenessa</i> sp. Darboux, 1899	Sigalionidae					
<i>Leodice laticeps</i> (Ehlers, 1868)	Eunicidae		Eunicida			
<i>Scoletoma laurentiana</i> (Grube, 1863)	Lumbrineridae					
<i>Lumbrineris bifurcata</i> McIntosh, 1885						
<i>Ninoe pulchra</i> Wesenberg-Lund, 1949						
<i>Diopatra chiliensis</i> Quatrefages, 1866	Onuphidae					
<i>Diopatra cuprea</i> (Bosc, 1802)						
<i>Diopatra micrura</i> Pires, Paxton, Quintino & Rodrigues, 2010						
<i>Diopatra</i> sp. Audouin & Milne Edwards, 1833						
<i>Chloeia</i> sp. Lamarck, 1818	Amphinomidae		Amphinomida			
<i>Linopherus hirsute</i> (Wesenberg-Lund, 1949)						
<i>Genus</i> sp.1	Leptoplanidae	Acotylea	Polycladida			Platyhelminthes
<i>Prosthiostomum</i> sp. Quatrefages, 1845	Prosthiostomidae	Cotylea				
<i>Pseudoceros</i> sp. Lang, 1884	Pseudocerotidae					
<i>Ampithoe</i> sp. Leach, 1814	Ampithoidae	Senticaudata	Amphipoda	Eumalacostraca	Malacostraca	Arthropoda
<i>Cheiriphotis</i> sp. Walker, 1904	Corophiidae					
<i>Microphotis blachei</i> Ruffo, 1952	Photidae					
<i>Elasmopus pecteniscrus</i> (Spence Bate, 1862)	Maeridae					
<i>Ceradocus</i> sp. Costa, 1853						
<i>Maera</i> sp. Leach, 1814						



**Table 2 (continued):**

Species	Family	Suborder	Order	Subclass	Class	Phylum
<i>Maera schieckei</i> Karaman & Ruffo, 1971						
<i>Melita</i> sp. Leach, 1814	Melitidae					
<i>Platorchestia monodi</i> (Mateus, Mateus & Afonso, 1986)	Talitridae					
<i>Cyproidea</i> sp. Haswell, 1880	Cyproideidae	Amphilochidea				
<i>Orchomene</i> sp. Boeck, 1871	Tryphosidae					
<i>Byblis</i> sp. Boeck, 1871	Ampeliscidae					
<i>Eobrolgus spinosus</i> (Holmes, 1905)	Phoxocephalidae					
<i>Penaeus</i> sp. Fabricius, 1798	Penaeidae	Dendrobranchiata	Decapoda			
<i>Alpheus estuariensis</i> Christoffersen, 1984	Alpheidae	Pleocyemata				
<i>Alpheus lobidens</i> De Haan, 1849 [in De Haan, 1833-1850]						
<i>Athanas nitescens</i> (Leach, 1814 [in Leach, 1813-1815])						
<i>Athanas</i> sp. Leach, 1814 [in Leach, 1813-1815]						
<i>Callianassa</i> sp. Leach, 1814 [in Leach, 1813-1815]	Callianassidae					
<i>Myra pernix</i> Galil, 2001	Leucosiidae					
<i>Philyra sagittifera</i> (Alcock, 1896)						
<i>Heteropanope glabra</i> Stimpson, 1858	Pilumnidae					
<i>Pilumnus longicornis</i> Hilgendorf, 1879						
<i>Pilumnus minutus</i> De Haan, 1835 [in De Haan, 1833-1850]						
<i>Charybdis</i> ( <i>Goniohellenus</i> ) <i>longicollis</i> Leene, 1938	Portunidae					
<i>Portunus segnis</i> (Forskål, 1775)						
<i>Apanthura sandalensis</i> Stebbing, 1900	Anthuridae	Cymothoida	Isopoda			
<i>Gnathia maxillaris</i> (Montagu, 1804)	Gnathiidae					
<i>Gnathia</i> sp. Leach, 1814						
<i>Bodotria</i> sp. Goodsir, 1843	Bodotriidae		Cumacea			
<i>Eocuma affine</i> Calman, 1904						

**Table 2 (continued):**

Species	Family	Suborder	Order	Subclass	Class	Phylum
<i>Eocuma rosae</i> Corbera & Galil, 2007						
<i>Apseudes</i> sp. Leach, 1814	Apseudidae	Apseudomorpha	Tanaidacea			
<i>Ctenapseudes chilensis</i> (Chilton, 1924)	Parapseudidae					
<i>Squilla mantis</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Squillidae	Unipeltata	Stomatopoda	Hoplocarida		
Genus sp.1	Acricoactinidae	Enthemonae	Actiniaria	Hexacorallia	Anthozoa	Cnidaria
Genus sp.2						
<i>Amphioplus</i> ( <i>Lymnellops</i> ) <i>hastatus</i> (Ljungman, 1867)	Amphiuridae	Gnathophiurina	Amphilepida	Myophiuroidea	Ophiuroidea	Echinodermata
<i>Amphioplus</i> sp. Verrill, 1899						
<i>Amphipholis squamata</i> (Delle Chiaje, 1828)						
<i>Clypeaster humilis</i> (Leske, 1778)	Clypeasteridae	Clypeasterina	Clypeasteroidea	Euechinoidea	Echinoidea	
<i>Cardiomya</i> sp. A. Adams, 1864	Cuspidariidae					
<i>Hiatula rosea</i> (Gmelin, 1791)	Psammobiidae		Cardiida	Autobranchia	Bivalvia	Mollusca
<i>Pharaonella wallaceae</i> (A. E. Salisbury, 1934)	Tellinidae					
<i>Serratina capsoides</i> (Lamarck, 1818)						
<i>Tellina</i> sp. Linnaeus, 1758						
<i>Hanleyanus vestalis</i> (Hanley, 1844)						
<i>Irus carditoides</i> (Lamarck, 1818)	Veneridae		Venerida			
<i>Protapes gallus</i> (Gmelin, 1791)						
<i>Timoclea</i> sp. T. Brown, 1827						
<i>Lamellolucina dentifera</i> (Jonas, 1846)	Lucinidae		Lucinida			
<i>Corbula taitensis</i> Lamarck, 1818	Corbulidae		Myida			
<i>Arcuatula senhousia</i> (Benson, 1842)	Mytilidae		Mytilida	Autobranchia		
<i>Anadara ehrenbergi</i> (Dunker, 1868)	Arcidae		Arcida			
<i>Scissilella tropica</i> (Melvill, 1897)	Yoldiidae		Nuculanida	Protobranchia		
<i>Cylichna collyra</i> Melvill, 1906	Cylichnidae		Cephalaspidea	Heterobranchia	Gastropoda	
<i>Bakawan rotundata</i> (A. Adams, 1850)	Haminoeidae					
<i>Ellobium</i> sp. Röding, 1798	Ellobiidae		Ellobiida			
<i>Omalogyra atomus</i> (Philippi, 1841)	Omalogyridae					
<i>Linatella caudate</i> (Gmelin, 1791)	Cymatiidae		Littorinimorpha	Caenogastropoda		

**Table 2 (continued):**

Species	Family	Suborder	Order	Subclass	Class	Phylum
<i>Cheilea cicatricosa</i> (Reeve, 1858)	Haminoeidae					
<i>Hypermastus epiphanes</i> (Melvill, 1897)	Eulimidae					
<i>Pseudonoba</i> sp. O. Boettger, 1902	Iravadiidae					
<i>Natica vitellus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Naticidae					
<i>Neverita didyma</i> (Röding, 1798)						
<i>Zafra selasphora</i> (Melvill & Standen, 1901)	Columbellidae		Neogastropoda			
<i>Crassispira</i> sp. Swainson, 1840	Pseudomelatomidae					
<i>Ehminolia degregorii</i> (Caramagna, 1888)	Trochidae		Trochida	Vetigastropoda		
<i>Antalis longitrorsa</i> (Reeve, 1842)	Dentaliidae		Dentaliida		Scaphopoda	
<i>Lingula</i> sp. Bruguère, 1791	Lingulidae		Lingulida		Lingulata	Brachiopoda

Results of diversity indices are represented in Table 3. According to the findings, maximum Shannon-Wiener and Margalef indices of some species were observed in station 3 while the minimum was in station 15. In addition, Maximum density found in station 15.

According to Table 1, the health status of station 3 was high while other stations were good except for stations 15, 16, 17, and 19. The health status of station 15 was distinguished as bad while 16, 17, and 19 were marked as poor status.

**Table 3: Diversity indices of benthic macroinvertebrates of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman (2018-2020)**

Station	Shanon	Margalof	Mean density	number of species
1	3.33	6.58	5.0	34
2	3.77	9.26	4.35	50
3	4.10	11.65	4.64	67
4	3.42	9.75	7.7	60
5	3.60	8.20	4.7	43
6	3.23	9.16	7.92	57
7	3.74	9.14	5.57	53
8	3.53	9.05	5.87	53
9	3.81	10.0	7.78	63
10	3.32	6.87	5.06	37
11	3.65	8.80	5.23	50
12	3.40	7.93	6.31	46
13	3.68	8.16	5.06	49
14	3.62	8.15	5.41	46
15	1.86	2.42	30.0	15
16	2.61	3.46	4.48	16
17	2.34	4.49	25.49	31
18	3.29	4.54	12.97	57
19	2.62	3.57	5.14	17

*SIMPER analysis*

Results of SIMPER analysis revealed that there were significant differences between stations in composition and abundance of macroinvertebrates ( $p < 0.05$ ). In addition, *Amphipholis squamata*, *Byblis* sp., *Capitella capitata*, and *Amphioplus* sp. were the most effective species that caused differentiation between stations.

Results of total organic matter and

sediment composition analysis are represented in Table 4. According to the results, maximum TOM found in station 9 and minimum in 20. The maximum amounts of sand and silt were found in stations 15 while minimum amounts were found in 7 and 4, respectively. The minimum and maximum amounts of clay were found in stations 20 and 14, respectively.

**Table 4: Total organic matter and sediment composition analysis of sediments of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman (2018-2020)**

Station	TOM (%)	Sand (%)	Silt (%)	Clay (%)
1	4.75	32.9	63.0	4.1
2	4.15	46.6	49.3	4.1
3	7.12	22.6	72.6	4.8
4	7.29	30.3	67.6	2.1
5	8.58	24.3	72.6	3.1
6	6.84	26.3	71.6	2.1
7	9.71	22.6	72.3	5.1
8	7.02	46.6	52.1	1.3
9	7.29	70.6	26.3	3.1
10	14.97	59.8	34.9	5.3
11	17.52	65.4	31.3	3.3
12	12.91	38.3	57.4	4.3
13	9.98	54.3	43.1	2.6
14	14.99	61.7	33.0	5.3
15	4.57	98.0	2.3	4.3
16	14.47	73.7	21.0	5.3
17	12.68	61.7	33.0	5.3
18	4.15	93.7	5.0	1.3
19	2.68	83.7	13.0	3.3

*Physico-chemical properties*

Results of Physico-Chemical properties of water are represented in Table 5. The minimum and maximum amounts of temperature were found in stations 17 and 3, respectively, while these values for salinity were in stations 2 and 15. Conductivity and pH were minimum in station 4. Minimum amounts of DO were found in station 12 while

maximum chlorophyll-a was measured in station 1. Maximum and minimum of turbidity found in stations 11 and 3, respectively.

*PCA and CCA analysis*

PCA analysis revealed that among 85 identified families, 33 family were the most effective component for dimension reduction. The identified

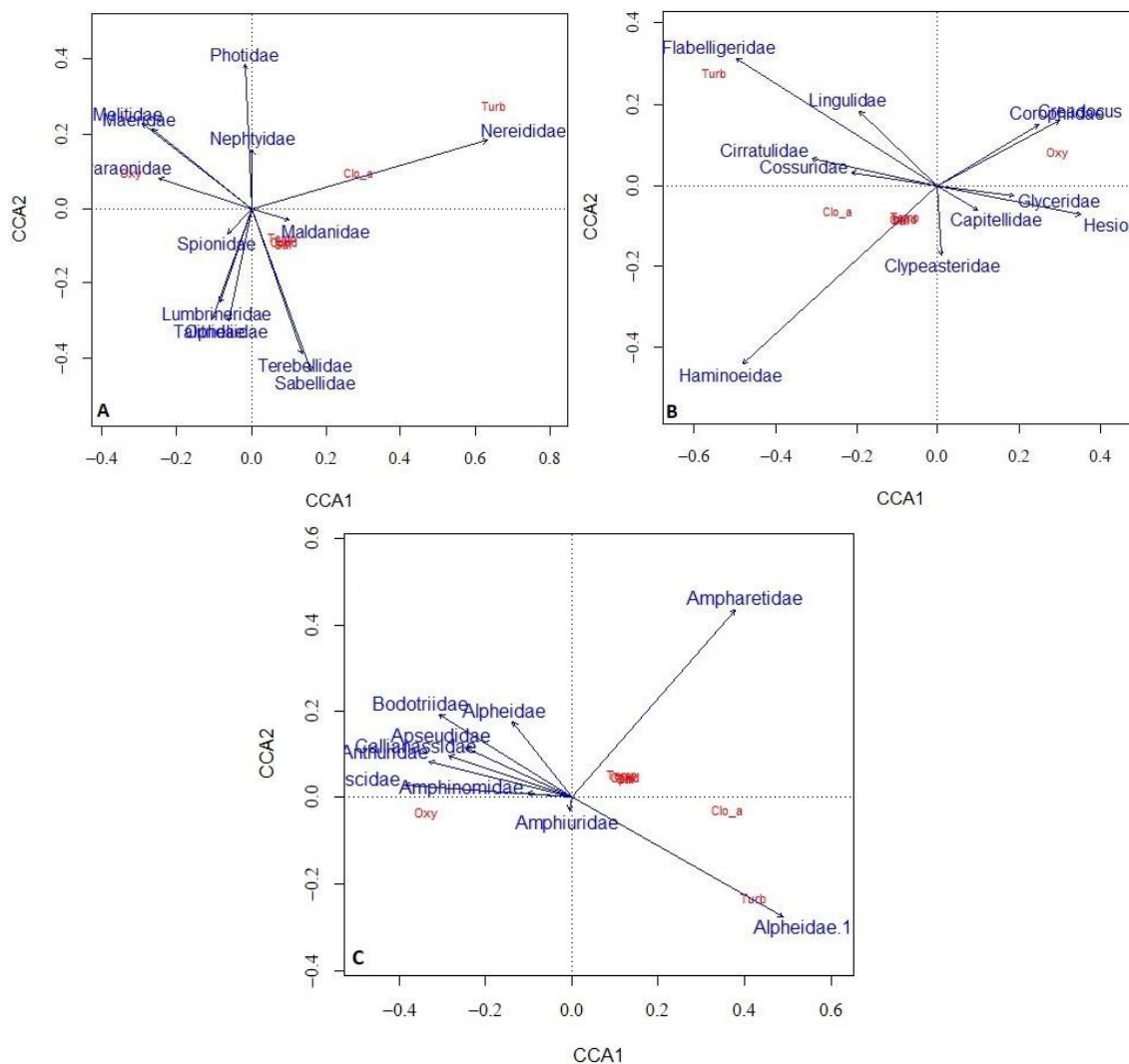
families were Ampeliscidae, Melitidae, Corophiidae, Terebellidae, Apseudidae, Prosthiostomidae, Amphinomidae, Amphiuroidae, Maeridae, Bodotriidae, Photidae, Nereididae, Talitridae, Ampharetidae, Callianassidae, Cirratulidae, Maldanidae, Clypeasteridae, Anthuridae, Cossuridae, Nephtyidae, Lumbrineridae, Opheliidae, Flabelligeridae, Sabellidae, Glyceridae, and Capitellidae and there upon, these families were selected for CCA analysis.

**Table 5: The mean values of physiochemical properties of water of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman (2018-2020).**

Station	Temperature (°C)	Conductivity (ms/cm)	Salinity (ppm)	DO (g/L)	pH	Chlorophyll-a (mg/L)	Turbidity
1	25.95	56.37	36.69	91.72	8.15	2.02	15.32
2	24.09	53.90	36.33	59.75	7.89	0.30	14.16
3	26.77	57.44	36.80	74.53	8.13	1.22	7.48
4	22.82	52.59	36.36	38.48	7.83	0.20	8.68
5	25.77	56.16	36.66	88.48	8.07	0.56	14.08
6	25.71	56.09	36.66	72.56	8.08	0.44	14.18
7	25.94	56.40	36.71	101.63	8.14	0.86	19.68
8	25.96	56.40	36.70	102.65	8.15	0.60	17.32
9	24.53	55.60	37.26	57.16	8.27	0.60	12.04
10	24.55	55.94	37.51	3.86	8.25	2.00	33.64
11	24.82	56.39	37.63	8.71	8.24	1.36	60.38
12	24.83	56.73	37.87	2.62	8.26	1.38	18.22
13	24.25	57.39	38.87	49.34	8.25	0.88	13.04
14	23.48	56.29	38.70	65.72	8.18	1.36	11.68
15	24.28	57.68	39.06	87.45	8.24	0.88	11.82
16	23.05	54.74	37.86	79.35	8.18	1.24	13.46
17	22.78	54.41	37.85	90.51	8.25	1.48	11.68
18	24.58	57.73	38.83	87.76	8.19	0.42	16.26
19	23.69	55.91	38.22	114.71	8.11	0.84	10.58

According to CCA results (Fig. 3), DO showed a strong direct relationship with Callianassidae, Anthuridae, Paraonidae, Maeridae, and Corophiidae. In addition, the strong indirect relationship was found between Haminoeidae and DO. Turbidity showed a strong direct

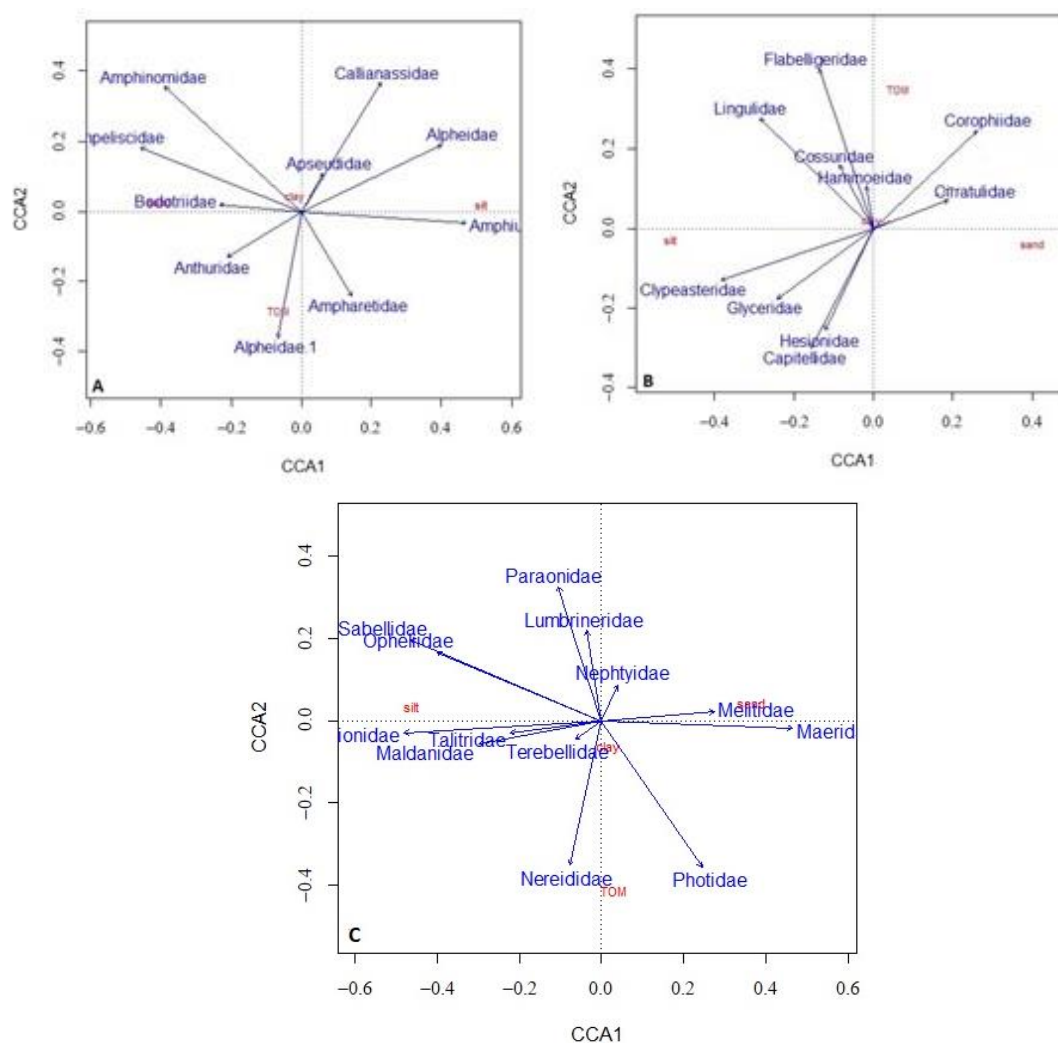
relationship with Flabelligeridae and a weak direct with Cirratulidae as well. Furthermore, chlorophyll-a showed a strong direct relationship with Nereididae, and other parameters showed a medium direct relationship with Maldanidae and Haminoeidae.



**Figure 3: Results of CCA analysis between physiochemical properties of water and main macroinvertebrates families of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman (2018-2020). Note: Temp: Temperature, Ras: Conductivity, Shor: Salinity, O: DO, Cl: Chlorophyll-a, COD: Turbidity**

According to CCA analysis (Fig. 4) and sediment composition results, clay was located in the center of the chart and did not show a remarkable relationship with microbenthic families. Although a weak indirect relationship with all families could be considered for clay, sand showed a significant strong relationship with Bodotriidae, Maeridae, and Melitidae directly and with Amphiuroidae and Spionidae, indirectly.

On the other hand, silt showed a significant direct relationship with Spionidae and Amphiuroidae and indirect with Maeridae and Melitidae. Finally, TOM showed a strong direct relationship with Nereididae and weak direct with Photidae.



**Figure 4:** Results of CCA analysis between sediment composition, TOM, and main macroinvertebrates families of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman (2018-2020).

## Discussion

Marine macroinvertebrates as secondary producers play an important role in feeding benthic animals in the ecosystem (Dolbeth *et al.*, 2003). The Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman are considered as high productive ecosystems (Owfi *et al.*, 2016), therefore biodiversity in these two regions is high. Understanding the biodiversity and abundance of macroinvertebrates species is a fundamental step towards achieving

sustainable management of ecosystems in this region. Our results indicated that in 4 stations in the studied area, we faced harsh environmental challenges for macroinvertebrates (Table 3). In addition, only one station showed high biodiversity status while others were near the border of moderate and good status (Table 3). Several researchers reported a decreasing trend in macroinvertebrates in marine ecosystems in different regions of the world (Schofield *et al.*, 2010; Bumber

*et al.*, 2016; Wu *et al.*, 2019). In addition, Lahijanzadeh *et al.* (2019) declared that concentrations of toxic elements such as Al, Fe, Cu, and Zn increased gradually in tissues and shells of benthic macroinvertebrates in the Persian Gulf. Therefore, the risk of pollutants threatens biodiversity of macroinvertebrates in the region and affects the food web. During this study, the number of 164 species belonging to 85 families and 31 orders of macroinvertebrates were identified in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman (Table 2). Dehghan Madiseh *et al.* (2012) sampled benthic invertebrates from the North-West of the Persian Gulf and reported 29 identified species. They were also noted that most sampling sites showed slightly polluted status through slightly AZTI's Marine Biotic Index. Furthermore, Gerami *et al.* (2016) sampled from macroinvertebrates communities in the Persian Gulf and their sampling sites had overlap with sampling sites in this study. However, 15 orders of macroinvertebrates containing all identified orders in their study, and the biodiversity health status of the Shannon-Wiener index was the poor status for all sites.

Spatial variation in the composition of macroinvertebrates communities in all sites was observed and SIMPER analysis showed that *Amphipholis squamata*, *Byblis* sp., *Capitella capitata* and *Amphioplus* sp. were the most effective species in differences between stations. This might indicate that these species tend to have more temporal or

spatial variation in the region. *A. squamata* and *Amphioplus* sp. belonging to class Ophiuroidea are the most distributed species in the Persian Gulf (Fatemi and Stöhr, 2019) and accustomed to a huge variety of habitats such as boulders, sand, or muds (Boissin *et al.*, 2008). *Byblis* is also an abundant genus of order Amphipoda that is distributed in all parts of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman (Mohammadi Dehcheshme *et al.*, 2016).

The relationship between macroinvertebrates families and environmental factors was estimated based on CCA analysis (Fig. 3). DO, turbidity, and chlorophyll-a were the dominant environmental factors that directly or indirectly affected the distribution and community composition of macroinvertebrates in the study area. Gerami *et al.* (2016) were also reported that DO and chlorophyll-a were the best variables for explaining changes in abundance over time. Although they did not analyze turbidity in their analysis. It is well known that oxygen availability is a major factor influencing the composition of macrobenthic communities. Indeed, oxygen is the first factor in macrobenthic respiration (Steel, 1980). Furthermore, the amount of oxygen production in water bodies has connection with the concentration of chlorophyll. Kuhnt *et al.* (2013) suggested that there is a species-specific relationship between benthic foraminiferal species and bottom-water oxygen content. However, benthic



habitats are complex, and a variety of environmental variables affect the diversity and density of macroinvertebrates. The composition of bed sediments and sediment's food availability are significant factors that affect composition of macroinvertebrates communities (Bumbeer *et al.*, 2016; Jun *et al.*, 2016; Mehdipour *et al.*, 2018). According to the results, sand, silt, and TOM showed a strong relationship with main macroinvertebrates families and affected their distribution. Several researchers reported the response of macrobenthic communities to sediment treatment (Doeg and Milledge, 1991; Suren and Jowett, 2001; Connolly and Pearson, 2007). Aliakbarian *et al.* (2020) reported the relation between the type of sediment and macrobenthic species in the southeast of the Caspian Sea. Although their results were based on RDA analysis instead of CCA, they also reported that sand and slit were most related in comparison with clay. According to figure 4, some families of identified macroinvertebrates showed relation with sediment composition. Data for comparison is scarce in literature. However, the results of this study were in accordance with researchers around the world. Anderson *et al.* (2013) found that there is a relationship between seafloor structure and infaunal biodiversity and reported that Polychaeta especially the Maeridae family has a correlation with sand in the studied area. Furthermore, Toba and Sate (2013) stated that the Nereididae family is a Filter-feeder benthic

macroinvertebrates that has a positive correlation with TOM of the sediments. Their results were similar to the results of this study.

In fact, sediment as the habitat of benthic species plays a major role in their lifestyle and suspension-feeders are more abundant in sandy flats due to better water current situation (Aliakbarian *et al.*, 2020). Grazing process of fauna and infauna species in marine bed directly related to the sediment composition and amounts of organic materials in sediments (Mermillod-Blondin *et al.*, 2005). In addition, wastewater inputs could penetrate the sediments and adversely affect macroinvertebrate diversity in aquatic ecosystems (Foomani *et al.*, 2020). The same results were observed by Mancinelli *et al.* (1998) for the effect of TOM on microbenthic communities. They reported that the presence of organic matter significantly affects distribution of soft-bottom macrobenthos of the Northern Adriatic Sea.

This study reported the main benthic macroinvertebrates families and species in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Diversity of macroinvertebrates reported and identified species in this study showed a strong relationship with DO and chlorophyll-a concentration (Fig. 3). Other measured environmental factors were also showed a slight influence on the diversity of marine macroinvertebrates. The diverse health status was not totally in a good condition and needs to be improved. These findings could be useful in

further studies for habitat management and monitoring programs.

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