Original Research Article

Outdoor gamma dose rates and excess lifetime cancer risks due to exposure rates at Salt Water Lakes, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Exposure rates, gamma dose rates and excess lifetime cancer risk around salt water lakes in Okposi Okwu and Uburu town, Ebonyi State, Nigeria were carried out, *in situ,* using two nuclear radiation meters (Radalert – 100 and Digilert – 50) and geographical position system (GPS). Measurements were taking randomly (at about 5 cm to 20 cm away from each lake) in thirty one (31) sampling locations each around the salt lakes at the standard level of one meter (1 m) above the ground to determine the exposure rates (in mRh^{-1}). Outdoor absorbed dose rate (D_{Out}), outdoor annual effective dose (AED_{Out}) and the excess lifetime cancer risk (ELCR) were evaluated and compared with similar reports and standards. Comparatively, the exposure rates, D_{Out}, AED_{Out} and ELCR values obtained for Uburu were similar to that of Okposi Okwu salt lake traceable to bluish black shale, with minor sandstone and silt lithology of the study locations. The mean results recorded for the two salt lakes exceeded the suggested safety limit of 0.013 mRh^{-1}, 60 $nGy\ h^{-1}$, 0.07 $mSv\ y^{-1}$, and 0.290×10^{-3} for general public respectively. In general, the results showed that terrestrial background ionizing radiation due to radionuclides in soil within the salt lakes is relatively higher and chance of developing cancer by immediate populace is very significant. Baseline study has been provided in the locations. Length of time spent within the salt lakes either at nearby farmlands and residential buildings should be minimized. Food crop cultivated near the salt lakes should be investigated for radioactivity concentrations.

Keywords: Lithology, background ionizing radiation areas, safety limit, radiation meters, salt water lakes

1. INTRODUCTION

Salt water lake refers to a body of surface water that is land locked, having about three grams of salt per liters (3g/L), typically table salt of sodium chloride and other dissolved solids (DS) and minerals. Its total dissolved solid (TDS) is higher than fresh water lakes characterized by having a lower TDS. Some of the salt water lakes in the world are Great Salt Lake in the northern part of Uttah, USA, Sambhar Salt Lake, Rajasthan State, India [1]; Okposi Okwu and Uburu salt lakes which are neigbouring town in Ohaozara Local Government Area, Ebonyi State,Nigeria [2, 3].

Background ionizing radiation in an environment is principally influenced by variation in terrestrial composition, cosmic rays and lithology. Radioactivity in the earth's crust and water bodies comes majorly from radionuclides of Uranium and thorium series and radioisotopes of potassium (^{40}K) in soil and bedrock [4]. Their concentrations in the environment significantly affect terrestrial gamma dose levels [5] and the major pathways of human exposure to radiation are through direct external exposure from gamma rays and internal exposure; comprising of inhalation of radioactive gas or particulate and ingestion of water, food and other substances. It is possible to have alpha, beta and gamma emitting radioisotopes and radionuclides in an environment as major radioactive elements found in air come from radium gas (^{222}Rn); a daughter product of ^{226}Ra and radon (^{220}Rn); a daughter product of ^{232}Th, which on release from 10 to 30 cm sub – surface soil, enters the human cells through inhalation pathway.

These particles could attack the deoxyribonucleic acids (DNA) molecules resulting in acute or chronic biological effects depending on radiation doses, time of exposure, radio sensitivity of the cells, organs exposed and the age of individual. Alpha and beta particles in biological cells are far more hazardous than gamma radiation. This is because of their ionizing power than gamma radiation, however, the penetrating power of gamma rays are than the two particles. The main stochastic effects in the context of ionizing radiation are cancer and genetic effects. Individual develop cancer whether or not they are exposed to carcinogenic agents, however, exposure to carcinogen increases the probability of cancer; the greater the exposure, the greater is the increased likelihood.

Salt water lakes in Okposi Okwu and Uburu Okposi has existed for over 400 years [6]. The two towns lies between latitude 06° 02′ and 0°6 07′ and longitude 07° 42′ 31″ and 07° 51′ 37″. The area is underlain by sedimentary rocks that belong to the Asu river group of Abian age [7] comprising generally of bluish black shale with minor sandstone lithology [8]. Enhanced levels of naturally occurring radionuclides and radioisotopes might be present in Okposi Okwu and Uburu salt lakes leading to increased levels of background ionizing radiation that could present a risk to human cells. Farm lands are cultivated about 10 m away from the lakes while residential buildings are between 25 m to 100 m away from each of the salt lakes.

High background radiation areas had been reported in Guarapari in Brazil, Orissa and Kerala coast in India, Ramsar in Iran and Yangjiang in China [9, 10]. Higher absorbed dose rate was established in Saline Qarun Lake, South of Cairo, Egypt [11]; from samples of river sediments in

Northern Pakistan [12]; in beach sand along North east coast of Tamilnadu, India [13]. High background ionizing radiation was reported in Abeokuta and Jos in Nigeria [14 – 17]. Background ionizing radiation studies in Nigeria were also carried out in Market environment of oil producing area of Rivers State [18] and coal mining areas of Gombe State [19]. Studies in Southeastern Nigeria are quite limited as some other localities including salt water lake areas in Ebonyi State have not been investigated, therefore, the need for this study; to measure and evaluate the exposure rates, absorbed dose rate, annual effective dose and excess lifetime cancer risk due to the contributions of radionuclides and radioisotopes in the environment which are the objectives of this study.

2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

Measurement was taken, *in situ,* between December to February identified as the dry season of the area using Digilert – 50 and Radalet – 100 radiation monitor (S.E International, Inc., summer town USA), containing a Geiger Muller Tube capable of detecting charged particles (alpha and beta) and photons (gamma rays and x - rays) within a temperature range between – 10℃ and 50℃. A geographical positioning system (GPS) was employed to measure the thirty – one (31) sampled locations each of the salt lakes at about 5cm away from the lake water for At measurement in the site, the tube of the radiation monitors were raised to a standard height of 1.0 m above the ground with its windows facing vertically upward, thereafter, vertically downward while the GPS reading was taken at that spot. Readings were repeated three times and then the average exposure rate was determined in milli – Roentgen per hour ($mR\ h^{-1}$) at each site on different days between the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurement, (NCRP) recommended hours of 1300 and 1600 [20] within 3 months to account for any fluctuation within the environment.

Plate 1. Okposi Okwu salt water lake in Ohaozara LGA, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Plate 2. Uburu salt water lake in Ohaozara LGA, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

3. RESULTS

Data set for *in situ* measurement of outdoor exposure rates within Okposi Okwu and Uburu salt lakes were converted to absorbed doses rate, annual effective dose and excess lifetime cancer risks presented in Table 1. Table 1 also compares the results obtained in the two salt lakes with available generally accepted worldwide standards. Figure 1 shows the frequency distribution histogram of the exposure rates within Okposi Okwu salt lakes while Figure 2 shows the frequency distribution histogram of the exposure rates within Uburu salt lakes. Figure 3 showed the regression plot between exposure rate at Okposi okwu and Uburu salt Lakes from which the coefficient of correlation (ρ) was determined. Skewness and kurtosis statistics of the distribution of exposure rates at the salt lakes were also determined using SPSS version 21 software package.

Table 1. Exposure doses rate at the salts lakes and associated potential radiological risk

Sample location/Standards	**Minimum exposure rate** $(mR\ h^{-1})$	**Maximum exposure rate** $(mR\ h^{-1})$	**Mean exposure rate** $(mR\ h^{-1})$	$\boldsymbol{D_{out}}$ $(nGy\ h^{-1})$	$\boldsymbol{AED_{out}}$ $(mSv\ y^{-1})$	**ELCR** $\mathbf{10^{-3}}$
Okposi Okwu	0.016±0.003	0.031±0.002	0.0216±0.003	187.75±29.09	0.288±0.045	1.007±0.156
Uburu	0.015±0.001	0.0411±0.002	0.025±0.006	218.90±53.96		1.169±0.282
[21]			0.013*	60	0.07	
[22]						0.29

0.013* was adopted from [18]

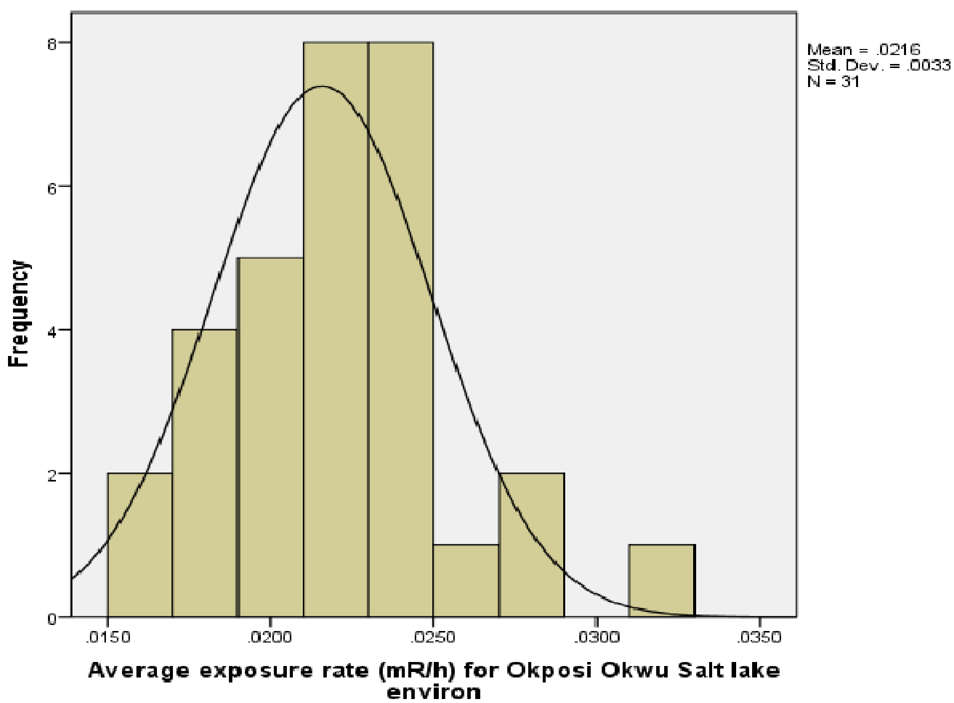

Figure 1. Frequency histogram distribution for Okposi Okwu Salt Lake environ

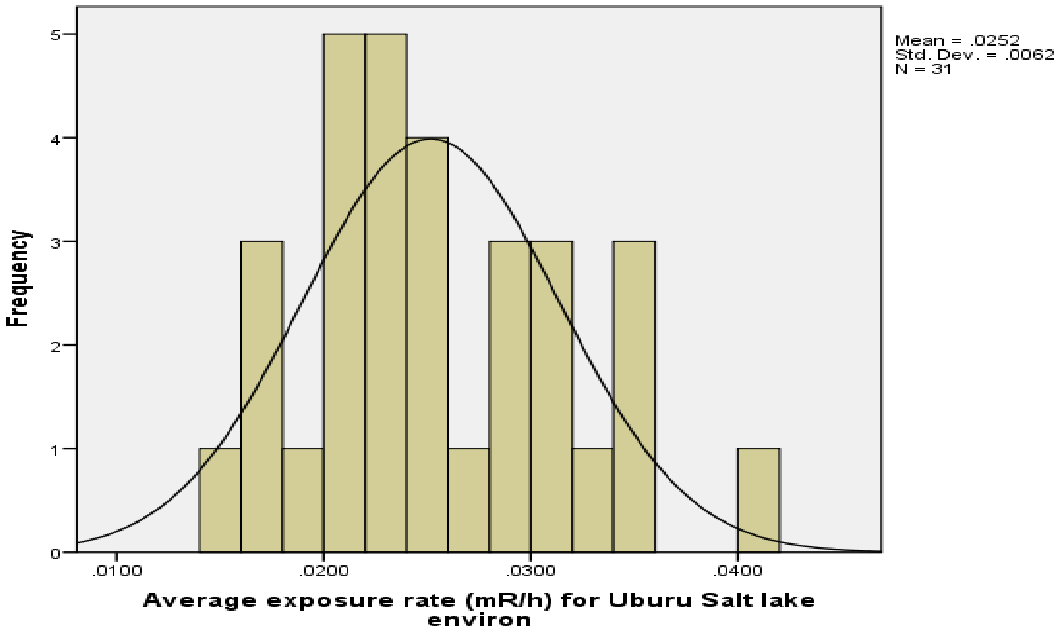

Figure 2. Frequency histogram distribution for Uburu Salt Lake environ

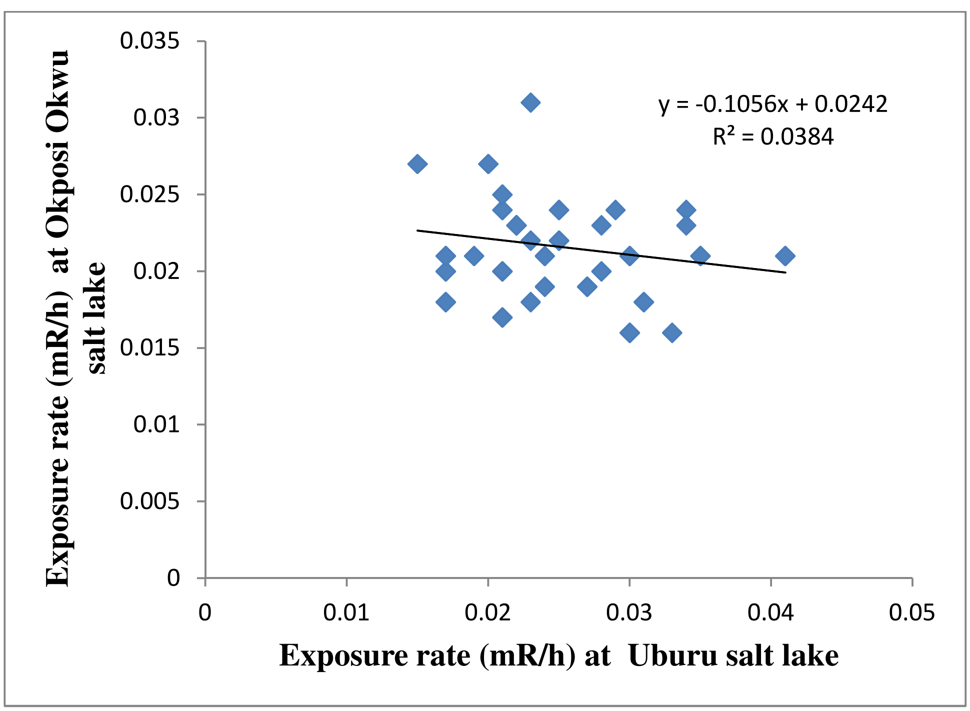

Figure 3. Regression plot between exposure rate in Okposi Okwu and Uburu salt lakes ($\rho = 0.195$)

3.1 Exposure rates and Outdoor Absorbed Dose Rate in air (D_{Out})

The outdoor exposure rate at I m above the ground was determined by averaging the 3 measurements in $mR\ h^{-1}$. Using equation 1, data set obtained from outdoor exposure rate in ($mR\ h^{-1}$) were converted to absorbed dose rate (D) in $nGy\ h^{-1}$, and presented in Table 1 for Okposi Okwu and Uburu.

$$D_{Out}\ (nGy\ h^{-1}) = \text{Exposure rate}\ (mR\ h^{-1}) \times 8.7 \times 10^{3} \quad (1)$$

Observation from Table 1 showed that the outdoor exposure rate ranged from 0.016±0.003 $mR\ h^{-1}$ to 0.031±0.002 $mR\ h^{-1}$ with mean value of 0.0216±0.003 $mR\ h^{-1}$ and from 0.015±0.001 $mR\ h^{-1}$ to 0.0411±0.002 $mR\ h^{-1}$ with mean value of 0.025±0.006 $mR\ h^{-1}$ for Okposi Okwu and Uburu salt lakes respectively. The results were higher than standard limit of 0.013 $mR\ h^{-1}$ [18].

D_{Out} for Okposi Okwu salt lake ranged from 139.2 $nGy\ h^{-1}$ to 269.7 $nGy\ h^{-1}$ with a mean 187.75±29.10 $nGy\ h^{-1}$ while Uburu result ranged from 130.5$nGy\ h^{-1}$ to 356.7 $nGy\ h^{-1}$ with a of 218.1±53.96 $nGy\ h^{-1}$. Both respectively were about 3.1 and 3.6 times higher than the world average report of 60 $nGy\ h^{-1}$ by United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation [21]. The D_{Out} results were higher than the range of 51.61 – 171 $nGy\ h^{-1}$ obtained in Saline Qarun Lake in Egypt [11]; Mean results reported in Kirklareli Turkey [23]; at Gold mining site, Itagunmodi, South – western Nigeria [24] and the outdoor external dose of 87.47 $nGy\ h^{-1}$ from river sediments of Northern Pakistan [12]. However, the study agreed favourably with the highest results obtained at Rukpokwu International Market, in oil producing area of Rivers State [18].

3.2 Outdoor Annual Effective Dose (AED_{Out})

The annual effective dose (AED_{Out}) in $mSv\ y^{-1}$ was calculated from the absorbed dose rate by applying the dose conversion factor of 0.7 $Sv\ Gy^{-1}$ adopted from [21] report with outdoor occupancy factor of 0.25, expressed in equation 2 and results presented in Table 1 for Okposi Okwu and Uburu. The outdoor occupancy factor of 0.25 was employed instead of the popular 0.2 since the people living and farming within the salt lakes area spends average of six hours outdoor.

$$AED_{Out} = D(nGy\ h^{-1}) \times 8760 \times 0.7(Sv\ Gy^{-1}) \times 0.25 \quad (2)$$

As observe from Table 1, the values for Okposi Okwu salt lake ranged from 0.213 to 0.413 $mSv\,y^{-1}$ with a mean of 0.288±0.045 $mSv\,y^{-1}$ which is about 4.1 times higher than the [21] report of 0.07$mSv\,y^{-1}$ as the average outdoor annual effective dose. While Uburu salt lake ranged from 0.200 to 0.547 $mSv\,y^{-1}$ with a mean of 0.333±0.081 $mSv\,y^{-1}$, which is 4.8 times higher than [21] report. The Okposi Okwu result agreed fairly with the study carried out in Abeokuta in South – western Nigeria and Jos in North – central Nigeria [14]. Furthermore, Uburu salt water lake was in good agreement with 0.45 $mSv\,y^{-1}$ established by [15] in Abeokuta while Okposi Okwu salt lakes agreed favourably with the study carried out by [18] at Rukpokwu International Markert in Rivers State. However, the two salt water lakes were lower than 0.62 $mSv\,y^{-1}$ and 0.92 $mSv\,y^{-1}$ established at Tamilnadu, India [13] and Northern Pakistan [12] respectively.

3.3 Excess Lifetime Cancer Risks ($ELCR$)

Human exposure to ionizing radiation at low levels for a long time can result to stochastic effects like cancer and genetic effects [25]. The excess lifetime cancer risk deals with the probability of developing cancer over a life time at a given exposure level [22, 26] and is calculated using equation 3 and the results presented in Table 1 for Okposi Okwu and Uburu respectively.

$$ELCR = AED_{Out}\,(mSv\,y^{-1}) \times DL(y^{-1}) \times RF(Sv^{-1}) \qquad (3)$$

Where ELCR is the excess lifetime cancer risk and the value of 0.290×10^{-3} has been recommended as the average standard [21, 22], AED_{Out} represents the annual effective dose, DL represents for the average duration of life estimated to be 70 years and RF is the risk factor which is the fatal cancer risk per sievert. For stochastic effects, the International Commission on Radiological Protection [27 – 29] publications uses RF as 0.05 for the public exposure [22].

Excess lifetime cancer risk for Okposi Okwu ranged from 0.746×10^{-3} to 1.446×10^{-3} with the mean of 1.007±0.156; while for Uburu, it ranged from 0.700×10^{-3} to 1.915×10^{-3} with the mean value of 1.169×10^{-3}. Both results were about 3.5 and 4.0 times higher than the average standard value 0.2×10^{-3} [22]; about 25 and 29 times respectively higher than Maiganga coal mining area, Akkok LGA, Gombe, North – east, Nigeria [19]. In addition, Okposi Okwu and Uburu salt lakes were respectively in favourable agreement with 1.05×10^{-3} (Faroun

Zone) and 1.12×10^{-3} (Anabta Zone), both at large scale manufacturing industrial area of Tulkarem Province [30]. However, the results of the present study were both lower than 3.21×10^{-3} obtained in Northern Pakistan [12].

3.4 Statistical Analyses

Frequency histogram distributions for Okposi Okwu and Uburu showed that most of the data sets clustered at the center, with a bell shaped curve (Figure 3). Linear regression and correlation are two different techniques that are concerned with prediction and strength of the relationship/ association between two variables respectively. The scatter plots are shown in Figure 1. While the negative and very weak correlation coefficient ($\rho = 0.195$) between data sets of Okposi Okwu and Uburu salt lakes indicates that the contributions of the background ionizing radiation from the environment could be from different sources of radionuclides/radioisotopes in the environment.

Skewness and kurtosis statistics were estimated for Okposi Okwu and Uburu data sets. The coefficient of skewness is a measure of the degree of symmetry in a variable distribution. While the coefficient of kurtosis measures the degree of tailedness (outliers) in a variable distribution. Data set for Okposi Okwu (0.603) and Uburu (0.550) are approximately or moderately symmetrical because the results are near zero; which is perfectly symmetrical (normal distribution). A skewness of exactly zero is quite implausible for real – data sets. A normal distribution has a kurtosis of exactly zero called mesokurtic distribution, which is a reference standard. Distribution is platykurtic with thinner tails if kurtosis is less than zero and leptokurtic distribution with fatter tails if kurtosis is greater than zero. While data set for Okposi Okwu (0.863) is fairly leptokurtic distribution, that of Uburu (– 0.065) is platykurtic distributions.

4. DISCUSSION

Uniformity of readings of exposure rate were observed in some sampling points in both salt lakes, suggesting that the points could be the pathway through which the rural women follow to their respective homes which may have equally been spilled by salt water. The relatively high background radiation obtained in this work for the first time in the locality was considered as sum of the terrestrial and cosmic rays contributions. The mean absorbed dose rate annual effective dose and excess lifetime cancer risks for Uburu salt lake compares favourably well with that of Okposi Okwu which could be attributed to similar local lithology in the localities. Okposi Okwu and Uburu town are geologically located in Lower Benue Trough characterized by lead (Pb) and zinc (Zn) minerals in form of their ores [31]. The area is made up of thick sequence of slightly deformed Cretaceous sedimentary rocks made up of essentially of Abian shales, subordinate silt stones of the Asu River Group [31, 32]. An area with shale, sandstones and silt stone lithology emits radiation to the environment. Radioisotope of lead (^{210}Po) is alpha and beta emitter, therefore ^{222}Rn and ^{220}Rn gases could possibly dominate the salt lakes environment. Generally, the bedrock of the area which is made up of sedimentry rocks principally accounts for higher gamma dose rate obtained in this work. Furthermore, the results agreed favorably with similar studies while they also differed with some others. Diverse lithology and associated complex tectonic features contributes to environmental radioactivity [23]. It is worthy to mention that the study did not extend to raining season which could have given an interesting results and comparison, however, is the next line of research study to explore.

CONCLUSION

Despite the background ionizing radiation report in different countries of the world including Nigeria, especially in mining areas, market and commercial areas, industrial, agricultural, mountain and rocky areas, the level at salt lake environ of Okposi Okwu and Uburu located in Ohaozara LGA, Ebonyi State had not been determined and reported. The study report that the salt lake environs are locations of higher background ionizing radiation than some studies reported in the literature and as a consequence the immediate populace may significantly be exposed to high gamma dose emanating from the salt lakes environ. Furthermore, the assessment of excess lifetime cancer risk due to gamma dose rate revealed that the probability of developing cancer over the average life span (estimated as 70years) is higher than reported studies in the literature. This study has provides essential baseline information needful and useful to radiation protection and measurement agencies and for future references in the area. Residential houses and farm lands should be sited far away from the salt lakes and also regular monitoring of background ionizing radiation levels within the environment should be encouraged. Since the areas within the salt lakes produce large quantities of food crops and livestock that are distributed within the neighboring localities, there is therefore need to examine the radionuclide content and radiological risk indices of food crops and livestock produced within the areas.

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