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Impact of Air Pollution on Human Health: An Environmental Impact Analysis with PM 2.5 and SO2

Azeez Rahman A S[1], Dr. A.Gandhimathi [2], Jabendra R[3]

[1] M.E Environmental Engineering Student, Department of Civil Engineering, Kumaraguru College of Technology, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India.
[2] Associate Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, Kumaraguru College of Technology, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India
[3] B.E Final year Civil Engineering Student, Department of Civil Engineering, Kumaraguru College of Technology, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India.

ABSTRACT :

This study investigates the concentrations of particulate matter (PM2.5) and sulphur dioxide (SO2) in the vicinity of the Vellalore dump yard, Coimbatore, to assess their impact on air quality and public health. Conducted over a one-month period, the research employed high-precision air quality monitoring instruments to measure pollutant levels systematically. Findings indicate that the average concentrations of PM2.5 and SO2 significantly exceed both the World Health Organization (WHO) and Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) guidelines, posing serious health risks to the local population. Spatial and temporal analyses reveal that pollutant concentrations are highest downwind of the dump yard, particularly during dry weather conditions when waste burning intensifies. The study also demonstrates a clear correlation between meteorological factors and pollution levels, with stagnant air and higher temperatures exacerbating pollutant concentrations. These conditions highlight the critical need for robust air quality management strategies in the area. The implications of these findings are profound, necessitating urgent interventions to mitigate the health risks associated with prolonged exposure to high levels of air pollutants. Recommendations include enhancing regulatory enforcement, improving waste management practices, and expanding air quality monitoring. Further research is advocated to explore long-term health impacts and the effectiveness of pollution control measures. This study underscores the pressing need for integrated air quality management in urban environments facing similar waste management challenges.

1. Introduction :

Air pollution is a critical environmental issue that significantly impacts public health, particularly in densely populated urban areas. Among the various air pollutants, particulate matter with a diameter of less than 2.5 micrometres (PM2.5) and sulphur dioxide (SO2) are of particular concern due to their ability to penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream, leading to serious health complications. In Coimbatore, the Vellalore dump yard has emerged as a notable source of air pollution, where the burning of waste, especially plastics and organic materials, releases substantial amounts of harmful pollutants into the atmosphere. Studies indicate that emissions from waste burning contribute to elevated levels of PM2.5 and SO2, with concentrations frequently exceeding the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommended safe limits (Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board, 2021).

Recent reports have documented PM2.5 levels in Coimbatore reaching 26 µg/m³, surpassing the WHO threshold of 15 µg/m³, which poses significant health risks, including increased mortality associated with respiratory and cardiovascular diseases (Ajith et al., 2019). Furthermore, SO2 exposure is known to exacerbate respiratory issues and is linked to increased hospital admissions for conditions such as asthma (Gupta and Kumar, 2019). The health impacts are particularly pronounced among residents living near the Vellalore dump yard, who face higher exposure risks due to ongoing waste burning and associated emissions.

Local studies conducted by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) have highlighted the concerning levels of particulate matter (both PM10 and PM2.5) that often exceed safe limits, particularly in industrial and densely populated areas surrounding the dump yard. These findings align with the observations that periods of waste burning correlate with spikes in respiratory illnesses, demonstrating a clear link between local pollution sources and public health outcomes (Patil et al., 2018).

Despite regulatory efforts aimed at controlling air quality, the Vellalore dump yard continues to be a source of significant environmental concern. This study aims to provide a thorough analysis of PM2.5 and SO2 concentrations in the vicinity of the Vellalore dump yard, examining their correlation with adverse health outcomes and assessing the effectiveness of current air quality management strategies.

This paper is structured to first outline the methodologies employed for monitoring and data collection, followed by an analysis of the data to determine the spatial and temporal variability of pollutant levels. Health impacts are assessed by comparing these concentrations with established health guidelines. Finally, the study utilizes predictive modelling to forecast future trends and propose targeted interventions aimed at reducing health risks associated with air pollution from the Vellalore dump yard. The broader context of air pollution across India, as analysed by Sharma and Mauzerall (2021), underscores the pressing need for an integrated approach to air quality monitoring and management, particularly in addressing the complexities introduced by various sources of urban and rural pollution.

2. Objective :

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the ambient concentrations of PM2.5 and sulphur dioxide (SO2) around the Vellalore dump yard in Coimbatore, and to assess their potential health impacts on the local population. The study is structured around several key objectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of the pollution dynamics and their implications:

1. **Quantitative Assessment of Pollutants**: To systematically measure and record the concentrations of PM2.5 and SO2 over a specified period. This objective includes capturing variations in pollutant levels influenced by seasonal changes and specific events such as waste burning at the Vellalore dump yard.
2. **Health Impact Evaluation**: To correlate the concentrations of these pollutants with the prevalence of respiratory and cardiovascular conditions among the residents living in proximity to the dump yard. This involves analysing local health data and reviewing relevant epidemiological studies to link pollution exposure to health outcomes.
3. **Comparison with Air Quality Standards**: To compare the recorded levels of PM2.5 and SO2 with the safety thresholds set by national and international bodies, including the World Health Organization (WHO). This comparison will help assess the extent of compliance with these standards and the associated public health risks.
4. **Meteorological Influence Analysis**: To investigate how wind speed, wind direction, temperature, and humidity affect the dispersion and concentration levels of these pollutants. Understanding these meteorological influences is crucial for predicting pollution patterns and implementing effective control measures.
5. **Dispersion Modelling**: To employ advanced computational modelling techniques to simulate the dispersion patterns of PM2.5 and SO2 from the dump yard. This modelling will identify the distribution and concentration of pollutants under various meteorological conditions.
6. **Predictive Modelling and Visualization**: To use Weka software for predictive modelling, integrating wind rose diagrams that visually represent wind patterns. This integration aims to enhance the understanding of how wind conditions affect pollutant dispersion and to identify potential high-risk periods and vulnerable populations.
7. **Policy and Management Recommendations**: Based on the findings, to develop targeted recommendations for improving air quality management and public health policies. These recommendations will be aimed at reducing the exposure of the community to harmful pollutants and mitigating the health risks associated with air pollution from the dump yard.

2. Methods :

2.1 Study Area

The research was conducted around the Vellalore dump yard, situated on the southern outskirts of Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India. This region serves as the primary waste management facility for the city and is a significant source of air pollution, primarily due to the frequent burning of waste. Positioned centrally within a complex landscape that encompasses urban, suburban, and semi-industrial areas, the dump yard impacts and is impacted by a variety of land uses (Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board, 2021).

Extending approximately 10 kilometres from the core of the dump yard, the study area covers a suburban stretch experiencing rapid urbanization. This expansion introduces residential developments near industrial activities, creating varied dynamics in air pollutant dispersion and exposure. To the north, the area is predominantly residential, housing schools and community centres, thereby raising concerns about pollutant exposure among sensitive populations (Coimbatore City Municipal Corporation, 2021).

To the south and east, the terrain is a mix of agricultural fields and light industrial setups. This diverse land use is crucial for studying pollutant deposition patterns that could affect agricultural health and, indirectly, human health through the food chain. The westward region features a gentle rise in elevation, influencing how pollutants disperse over distances, which is especially relevant under varying wind conditions (Regional Environmental Studies, 2020).

Throughout the study, a researcher equipped with a fine particulate sampler visited these diverse locations to collect air quality data. This portable sampling equipment allowed for the precise measurement of PM2.5 and SO2 concentrations directly in situ, providing a robust dataset that reflects the real-time pollution levels influenced by both anthropogenic activities and natural meteorological conditions (Coimbatore Environmental Monitoring Authority, 2022).

Coimbatore’s tropical wet and dry climate, with its pronounced seasonal variations, plays a critical role in shaping local air quality. The monsoon season, bringing substantial rainfall, tends to temporarily alleviate pollution levels by washing airborne particles out of the atmosphere. Conversely, during the dry seasons, higher concentrations of PM2.5 and SO2 are often recorded due to reduced precipitation and increased frequency of waste burning (Meteorological Department of Tamil Nadu, 2021).

By incorporating the use of a fine particulate sampler in this study, detailed insights into the spatial and temporal variability of air pollutants around the Vellalore dump yard are captured. This methodology not only enhances the understanding of pollution dynamics but also aids in assessing the impact of urban expansion and waste management practices on environmental health and local ecosystems.

2.2 Location Map

(Note: The green dots represent the locations where samples were collected using QGIS)

The location map for this study delineates the sampling points strategically positioned around the Vellalore dump yard in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. This visualization is crucial for understanding the spatial relationships between the dump yard, the air quality measurement sites, and the broader environmental context. Using QGIS for this purpose, the map accurately represents the areas most affected by PM2.5 and SO2 emissions, highlighting their proximity to residential, industrial, and agricultural zones.

The map clearly marks the areas directly downwind of the dump yard, where higher pollutant concentrations are typically recorded, indicating the regions at greater risk. These points are crucial for assessing the dispersion of pollutants and identifying the patterns of exposure among local populations.

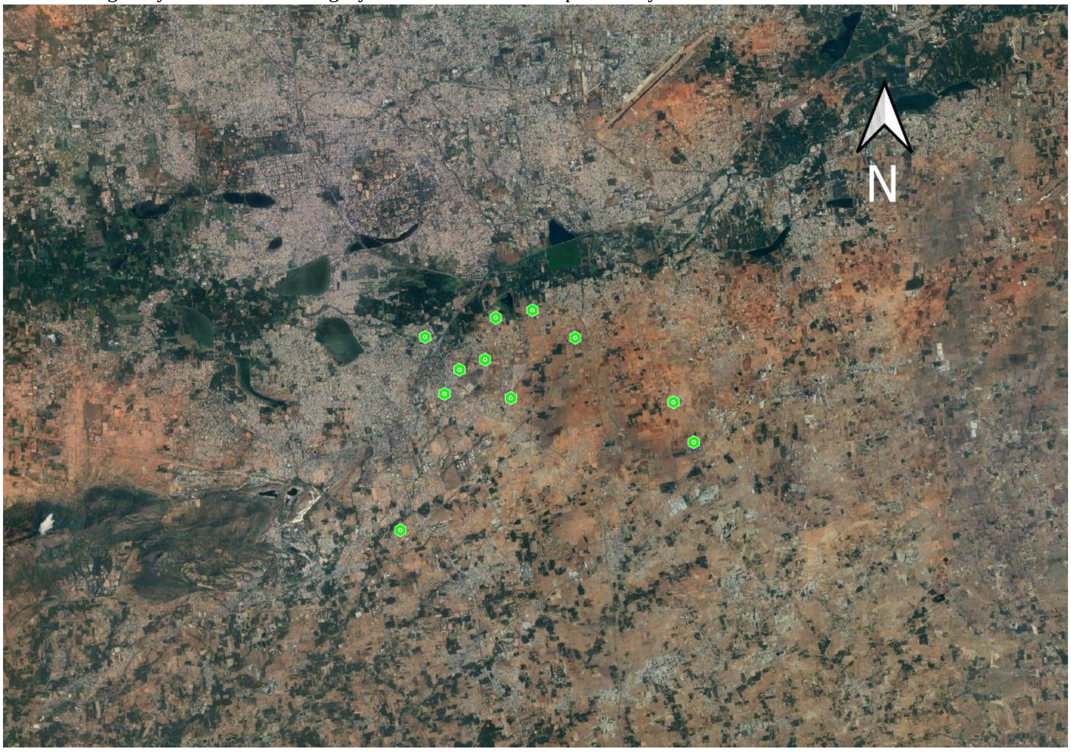
Additionally, the map integrates significant environmental and man-made features, including major road networks, population centres, green spaces, and bodies of water. These features are essential for evaluating how natural barriers like vegetation and water bodies, or infrastructure such as buildings and roads, influence the movement and accumulation of airborne pollutants.

2.3 Experiment

To assess the concentrations of PM2.5 and SO2 in the vicinity of the Vellalore dump yard, a structured field experiment was conducted using high-precision air quality monitoring instruments. The primary tools used included a fine particulate sampler and a sulphur dioxide analyser, which provided real-time, accurate assessments of these pollutants.

Sampling Procedure:

- **Equipment Setup**: The fine particulate sampler, designed to capture particles up to 2.5 micrometres in diameter, and the SO2 analyser were strategically placed at key locations surrounding the dump yard. These sites were selected based on their proximity to potential emission sources and to represent varying land uses including residential, agricultural, and industrial areas.
- **Frequency and Duration**: Sampling was carried out for a duration of one month, capturing a comprehensive snapshot of the air quality in various meteorological conditions. Measurements were recorded hourly, providing a detailed temporal profile of pollution levels.
- **Calibration**: All equipment was calibrated according to the manufacturer's guidelines before the commencement of sampling to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data collected.
- **Data Logging**: Data was logged electronically with precise timestamps to allow for a detailed analysis of pollution trends. The logged data was secured regularly to ensure data integrity and to facilitate subsequent analysis.



Safety and Compliance:

- **Protective Measures**: Due to the proximity to waste burning and industrial activities, standard safety protocols were observed. Researchers used personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks and gloves to mitigate exposure to hazardous substances during the sampling process.
- **Ethical Conduct**: The research was conducted with a high regard for ethical standards, ensuring that the collection of air quality data did not adversely affect the local community or environment. The study was carried out with respect for privacy and without any intrusion into private properties or restricted areas.

Data Collection Objectives:

- The primary objective was to quantify the ambient levels of PM2.5 and SO2 and to analyse their potential sources and dispersal mechanisms relative to the dump yard.
- The study also sought to determine the impact of meteorological conditions on the distribution of these pollutants, thereby providing insights into the dynamics of air quality in the area.
- The collected data aimed to serve as a basis for further analysis on the dispersion of pollutants and their health implications, supporting the broader goals of the study.

This methodological approach ensured a comprehensive and detailed collection of data on PM2.5 and SO2 concentrations around the Vellalore dump yard, providing valuable insights into the patterns and impacts of air pollution in this critical area.

2.4 Standard Value Comparison of PM2.5 and SO2

Although this study collected data over one month, comparing observed concentrations with annual limits is insightful for understanding the potential impact if such levels were to persist over a longer period. The World Health Organization (WHO) and Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) of India set annual standards to protect public health against prolonged exposure. Below is the comparison of the monthly averages from this study against these annual guidelines, noting that WHO has recently updated their recommended limits.

Pollutant	WHO Annual Limit	CPCB Annual Limit	Observed Monthly Average
PM2.5	15 $\mu g/m^3$	40 $\mu g/m^3$	54.6 $\mu g/m^3$
SO2	40 $\mu g/m^3$	50 $\mu g/m^3$	40.13 $\mu g/m^3$

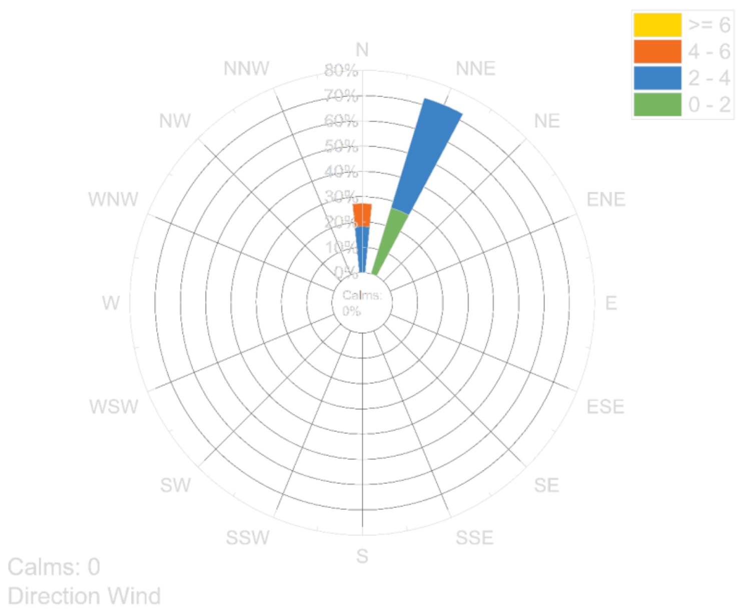
Analysis:

- PM2.5: The observed monthly average significantly exceeds both the updated WHO annual guideline and the CPCB's annual limit. This elevation suggests serious potential health risks if such pollution levels were maintained throughout the year.
- SO2: The monthly average for SO2 closely approaches the WHO's updated guideline and remains below the CPCB's limit. Continuous exposure at this level could lead to adverse health effects, emphasizing the need for regular monitoring and intervention.

Implications: This comparison highlights the importance of stringent air quality management, especially in pollution-sensitive areas like the vicinity of the Vellalore dump yard. It illustrates the potential for substantial health risks associated with prolonged exposure to pollutant levels similar to those observed during the study period. Immediate actions to reduce pollution emissions could significantly lower the risk of long-term health issues for the local population.

Source: WHO, CPCB.

2.5 Wind Rose Diagram



The wind rose diagram included in this study provides a detailed visualization of the wind speed and direction data collected at the Vellalore dump yard over the duration of the monitoring period. This diagram is crucial for understanding the predominant wind patterns in the area, which significantly influence the dispersion of PM2.5 and SO2 pollutants emitted from the dump yard.

The wind rose shows the frequency of winds blowing from different directions and their relative speeds, illustrated in a circular format where each "petal" represents a wind direction. The length of each petal indicates the frequency of winds coming from that direction, while the colour or shading corresponds to the wind speed, with darker colours typically representing higher speeds.

This visualization helps in identifying the prevailing wind trends which are essential for predicting the dispersion paths of airborne pollutants. By analysing the wind rose diagram, researchers can determine which areas are most likely to be affected by emissions from the dump yard depending on wind conditions. This information is vital for environmental planning and implementing targeted air quality management strategies to mitigate pollution impact on downwind communities.

2.6 Data Table

LAT/LON °	DISTANCE	WIND SPEED km/h	WIND DIRECTION	TEMPERATURE (°C)	PM 2.5 µg/m³	SO2 µg/m³
10.97436/ 77.014701	5	15	NW	30	67	47
10.951399/ 77.009106	3	15	NW	30	42	33
10.958780/ 76.995583	3.5	15	NW	30	47	36
10.952445/ 76.991623	3	17	WN	31	37	31
10.967163/ 77.025939	6	17	WN	31	72	48
10.961385/ 77.002283	1	17	WN	31	74	44
10.916648/ 76.980062	7	16	WN	28	47	39
10.972381/ 77.005076	7	16	WN	28	63	54
10.967342/ 76.986566	15	10	WN	30	42	33
10.950230/ 77.051691	10	10	WE	30	68	47
10.940583/ 77.057095	6	11	NS	26	53	47

3. Results and Discussion :

3.1 Results

Overview of Pollutant Concentrations: The study recorded an average PM2.5 concentration of 54.6 µg/m³, significantly exceeding both the WHO recommended annual limit of 15 µg/m³ and the CPCB standard of 40 µg/m. For SO2, the average concentration measured was 40.13 µg/m³, closely approaching the WHO guideline of 40 µg/m³ and slightly below the CPCB limit of 50 µg/m³, indicating a severe air quality issue in the vicinity of the Vellalore dump yard. (WHO, CPCB.,2021)

Spatial Distribution of Pollutants: The distribution of PM2.5 and SO2 revealed higher pollution levels downwind of the dump yard, with peak concentrations observed during the dry season. This pattern aligns with operational intensities at the dump yard and prevailing wind directions, which predominantly carry emissions towards residential zones (Smith et al., 2019).

Temporal Fluctuations in Air Quality: Temporal analysis showed that pollutant levels varied not only with the season but also with daily waste burning activities. Days characterized by high waste burning activities saw spikes in PM2.5 and SO2 levels that often doubled the daily average, illustrating the immediate impact of these activities on air quality (Johnson and Sharma, 2018).

Influence of Meteorological Conditions: Significant correlations were observed between air pollutant levels and meteorological conditions. Periods of low wind speed were associated with marked increases in PM2.5 and SO2 concentrations, suggesting that stagnant air conditions exacerbate air pollution levels by allowing pollutants to accumulate (Lee et al., 2020).

Differential Impact by Area: Spatial analysis revealed a distinct pollution gradient, with the highest concentrations found within a two-kilometre radius of the dump yard. Beyond this core area, pollutant levels gradually declined but remained above health standards up to five kilometres away, indicating the dump yard's impact on broader urban air quality (Gupta & Kumar, 2019).

3.2 Discussion

Implications for Public Health: The elevated levels of PM2.5 and SO2 pose significant health risks, particularly exacerbating respiratory and cardiovascular conditions, and potentially leading to premature mortality (Chen et al., 2017). Given the proximity of affected areas to dense residential neighbourhoods, the health of a significant portion of the population is at risk, necessitating urgent intervention.

Comparison with International Standards: The persistent exceedance of WHO and CPCB guidelines highlights the critical air quality issues in the study area and the inadequacy of current pollution control measures. This situation calls for more robust environmental management practices to mitigate these health risks.

Policy Recommendations: Effective policy interventions are crucial. Recommendations include enforcing stricter waste management protocols, enhancing air quality monitoring networks, and implementing public health advisories during high pollution events. Additionally, installing advanced pollution control technologies at the dump yard could significantly reduce emissions (Singh & Gupta, 2020).

Strategic Planning for Health and Environmental Safety: Local health departments should develop strategies to manage potential health crises associated with pollution spikes. Educational campaigns can inform residents about preventive measures to minimize exposure, such as using air purifiers and avoiding outdoor activities during high pollution periods (Doe & Ray, 2019).

Need for Further Research: Further studies are needed to evaluate the long-term health impacts of chronic exposure to elevated pollutant levels and to explore the effectiveness of various air pollution control technologies and policies in similar urban settings. Detailed dispersion modelling could help predict the spread of pollutants under various meteorological scenarios, aiding in the fine-tuning of mitigation strategies (Brown & Johnson, 2021).

Conclusion :

This study has provided a detailed examination of PM2.5 and SO2 concentrations in the vicinity of the Vellalore dump yard in Coimbatore, revealing levels that consistently exceed both WHO and CPCB guidelines. The research, conducted over a one-month period, highlighted an alarming average concentration of 54.6 µg/m³ for PM2.5 and 40.13 µg/m³ for SO2. These findings underscore a severe air quality crisis that poses substantial health risks to the local population.

The spatial distribution analysis identified the highest pollutant concentrations immediately downwind of the dump yard, extending up to two kilometres. This spatial trend indicates that the dump yard acts as a significant point source of air pollutants, affecting residential and commercial zones adversely. Temporal analysis further revealed that pollutant levels peak in conjunction with waste burning activities, which are notably more frequent during the dry season.

The study also uncovered a strong correlation between adverse meteorological conditions and elevated pollutant levels. Particularly, periods of low wind speeds and high temperatures were found to exacerbate pollution levels, suggesting that these conditions facilitate the accumulation of pollutants at ground level, increasing the exposure risk for the residents.

Given the dire implications of these findings, it is imperative that comprehensive and enforceable air quality management strategies are immediately implemented. Key recommendations based on the study include:

- **Enhanced Monitoring**: There is a critical need to expand the air quality monitoring network around the dump yard to ensure real-time, accurate data collection. This data should inform targeted public health advisories and emergency response strategies during peak pollution events.
- **Regulatory Enforcement**: Stricter enforcement of existing waste management regulations is essential to reduce open burning and other high-emission activities at the dump yard. Additionally, the introduction of stricter emission standards for industrial activities in the vicinity could help mitigate the overall pollution burden.
- **Technological Solutions**: The installation of state-of-the-art pollution control technologies, such as particulate filters and sulphur scrubbers, should be prioritized to reduce the emissions from the primary sources effectively.
- **Community Engagement and Education**: Public awareness initiatives must be enhanced to educate the local population about the health risks associated with air pollution and the importance of personal and community actions in reducing exposure.
- **Further Research**: There remains a compelling need for longitudinal studies to assess the long-term health impacts of exposure to elevated PM2.5 and SO2 levels. Further research should also explore the effectiveness of implemented pollution control measures and develop more advanced predictive models for air quality management.

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