A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF AIR POLLUTION AND HUMAN HEALTH IMPLICATIONS: STUDYING THE REMEDIAL STRATEGIES FOR A HEALTHY SOCIETY

BY

Nkechi Udochukwu OTTY-ANYANWU. Ph.D.
Department of Environmental Health Science,
School of Health Technology,
Federal University of Technology,
Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

And

Ezekiel James Bassey,
Department of Urban and Regional Planning,
Federal Polytechnic, Ukana,
Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

This study analysed the causes of air pollution and human health implications, studying the remedial strategies for a healthy society. In the context of carrying out this research, the following subheads among others were taken into consideration: concept of air pollution, concept of human health and concept of healthy society. The study mentioned the causes of air pollution to include: industrial emissions, vehicular exhaust/deforestation and agricultural activities. Respiratory diseases, cardiovascular problems and neurological/cognitive impairment among many others were mentioned as the effect of air pollution on human health. Remedial strategies of air pollution for a healthy society as stated in the study included: strengthening environmental regulations/policies, promoting clean/renewable energy sources and advancing green transportation systems. The study concluded that air pollution remains one of the most critical environmental and health challenges of the 21st century. One of the recommendations made was that the governments should enforce stricter air quality regulations, including emission controls on industries and vehicles.

Keywords: Air Pollution, Human Health, Healthy Society

INTRODUCTION

Air pollution is one of the most pressing environmental issues of the 21st century, with far-reaching consequences for both ecosystems and human health (Arshad, Hussain, Ashraf, Saleem, 2024). As industrialisation and urbanisation accelerate, the release of harmful pollutants into the atmosphere continues to rise, exacerbating respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, and environmental degradation (Tran, Tsai, ... and Chuang, 2023). The interplay between human activities and natural processes has led to a crisis that demands urgent intervention through scientific research, policy reforms, and community-driven solutions.

The causes of air pollution are multifaceted, encompassing both anthropogenic and natural factors. Industrial emissions, vehicular exhaust, deforestation, and agricultural activities significantly contribute to the presence of harmful substances such as carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen oxides

(NO_x), sulphur dioxide (SO_2), and particulate matter (PM) in the air (Perera 2017). Additionally, natural phenomena like wildfires, volcanic eruptions, and dust storms exacerbate pollution levels, compounding the negative effects on atmospheric quality. Understanding these sources is critical to formulating effective mitigation strategies.

The health implications of air pollution are profound and well-documented. Studies have linked exposure to airborne pollutants with increased cases of asthma, bronchitis, lung cancer, and even neurological disorders (Manisalidis, Stavropoulou, Stavropoulos & Bezirtzoglou, 2020). Vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, and individuals with pre-existing health conditions, are disproportionately affected by deteriorating air quality (Ade, 2024). Furthermore, prolonged exposure to fine particulate matter (PM2.5) has been identified as a major contributor to premature mortality worldwide.

Despite these alarming health effects, various remedial strategies can be implemented to curb air pollution and safeguard public health. Government policies, such as emissions regulations, clean energy initiatives, and improved public transportation systems, play a crucial role in reducing pollution levels (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2003). Technological innovations, including air filtration systems, electric vehicles, and sustainable industrial practices, also present viable solutions to mitigate harmful emissions. However, the effectiveness of these interventions depends on collective action and global cooperation.

Achieving a healthier society requires a comprehensive approach that integrates scientific research, public awareness, and policy enforcement. By fostering environmental consciousness and advocating for sustainable practices, communities can actively participate in reducing pollution levels (Awewomom, Dzeble, and Takyi, 2024). Additionally, interdisciplinary collaboration between scientists, policymakers, and environmental activists is essential to developing long-term solutions that balance economic growth with ecological preservation.

This study aims to provide a critical analysis of the causes of air pollution, its human health implications, and the remedial strategies needed to foster a healthier society. By examining existing research and case studies, this paper will highlight the urgency of addressing air pollution and the importance of adopting effective mitigation measures. Through this analysis, it becomes evident that only through proactive efforts can humanity protect itself from the devastating impacts of air pollution while ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come.

CONCEPT OF AIR POLLUTION

According to the World Health Organisation (2025), air pollution refers to the contamination of the Earth's atmosphere with harmful substances like gases, particles, or other chemicals, which can be released from natural sources or human activities and can negatively impact human health, the environment, and ecosystems when present in excessive amounts; common air pollutants include carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, ozone, and particulate matter.

“Air pollution is the release of pollutants such as gases, particles, biological molecules, etc. into the air that is harmful to human health and the environment” (Mackenzie and Turrentine, 2023). Air pollution is the presence of substances in the atmosphere that are harmful to humans

and other living beings or cause damage to the environment. Air pollution can be chemical, physical, or biological. Air pollution refers to the release of pollutants into the air—pollutants that are detrimental to human health and the planet as a whole. Air pollution is a mix of hazardous substances from both human-made and natural sources.

Air pollutants refer to anthropogenic or naturally occurring substances such as particulate matter, ozone, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and volatile organic compounds that have adverse effects on human health and ecosystems. Air pollution is the introduction into the air of substances harmful to humans and other living organisms (Manisalidis, Stavropoulou, Stavropoulou, and Bezirtzoglou, 2020).

The Academy of Science of South Africa, Brazilian Academy of Sciences, Brazil, German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, Germany, U.S. National Academy of Medicine, and U.S. National Academy of Sciences (2019) explained that air pollution is a major, preventable, and manageable threat to people's health, well-being, and the fulfilment of sustainable development.

CONCEPT OF HUMAN HEALTH

Human health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. It's more than just the absence of disease. Human health can be measured through disease incidence and prevalence, age-specific death rates, and life expectancy (Tulchinsky & Varavikova, 2014). Human health encompasses physical, mental, and social well-being. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as not merely the absence of disease but a state of complete well-being. This holistic approach emphasises the interconnection between various aspects of life, including lifestyle choices, environmental factors, and healthcare access. Maintaining good health requires a balance of nutrition, exercise, mental stability, and social interactions (Dalle, 2020).

Physical health refers to the body's ability to function optimally without illness or injury. It is influenced by genetics, diet, physical activity, and exposure to harmful substances. Regular medical check-ups, vaccinations, and a healthy lifestyle contribute significantly to disease prevention (Doherty, Del Giudice & Maggi, 2019). Moreover, advancements in medical science, improved sanitation, and access to healthcare services have increased life expectancy and reduced mortality rates.

Mental health is equally essential, as it affects cognitive functions, emotional stability, and overall quality of life. Psychological well-being ensures an individual can handle stress, make rational decisions, and maintain healthy relationships. Factors such as stress, anxiety, depression, and trauma can impair mental health, highlighting the need for emotional support, counselling, and mental health awareness. Societal stigma surrounding mental disorders often hinders proper treatment, emphasising the importance of education and advocacy.

Social health relates to an individual's ability to interact harmoniously within a community. Strong social connections contribute to emotional resilience and overall well-being. Support systems, including family, friends, and community networks, play a vital role in helping individuals navigate challenges. Social determinants such as education, employment, and access to healthcare also impact health outcomes, underscoring the importance of equitable policies and inclusive healthcare systems.

CONCEPT OF HEALTHY SOCIETY

A "healthy society" refers to a community where the majority of individuals experience a high level of well-being across physical, mental, and social aspects, characterised by factors like access to quality healthcare, equitable opportunities, strong social connections, a supportive environment, and a commitment to promoting healthy behaviours within the population; essentially, a society where people can thrive and live fulfilling lives with minimal barriers to health and well-being (Buse, Bestman, Srivastava, Marten, Yangchen & Nambiar, 2023).

A healthy society is one in which individuals enjoy optimal physical, mental, and social well-being, supported by clean environments, effective healthcare systems, and sustainable living conditions. In relation to air pollution and human health, a truly healthy society must prioritise clean air, safe water, and proper sanitation to prevent diseases and enhance quality of life. The absence of environmental hazards, such as toxic emissions and industrial pollutants, plays a crucial role in ensuring public health and longevity (Shetty, Sonkusare, Naik, Kumari & Madhyastha, 2023).

Air pollution is a major barrier to achieving a healthy society, as it contributes to respiratory diseases, cardiovascular conditions, and other chronic illnesses. When a community is exposed to high levels of pollutants from industrial emissions, vehicular exhaust, and deforestation, its overall well-being declines. A society that prioritises environmental conservation, reduces carbon footprints, and implements clean energy solutions is better equipped to promote long-term health and sustainability.

A healthy society also depends on strong policies and public awareness to combat air pollution and its health implications. Governments, businesses, and individuals must work together to enforce air quality regulations, promote eco-friendly technologies, and encourage sustainable urban planning. Public health initiatives, such as education on pollution control, waste management, and alternative transportation, help foster a culture of environmental responsibility, reducing the risks associated with poor air quality.

Ultimately, achieving a healthy society requires a multi-dimensional approach that integrates environmental protection, healthcare accessibility, and community engagement. Addressing air pollution through preventive measures and remediation strategies not only improves human health but also enhances economic productivity and social harmony. By adopting sustainable practices and ensuring equitable access to clean environments, societies can create healthier living conditions for present and future generations.

CAUSES OF AIR POLLUTION

Air pollution is caused by a combination of human activities and natural processes that introduce harmful substances into the atmosphere. These pollutants can significantly degrade air quality, posing serious threats to human health and the environment. The major causes of air pollution, as mentioned by numerous scholars including Srivastava (2022) and Manisalidis et al. (2020):

Industrial Emissions: Factories, power plants, and manufacturing facilities release large amounts of pollutants such as carbon monoxide (CO), sulphur dioxide (SO_2), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), and particulate matter (PM) into the air. These emissions result from burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and natural gas, leading to smog formation, acid rain, and respiratory diseases. Poor industrial waste management further exacerbates air pollution.

Vehicular Exhaust: The transportation sector is a major contributor to air pollution, with millions of vehicles emitting pollutants such as carbon dioxide (CO_2), nitrogen oxides, and unburned hydrocarbons. The combustion of gasoline and diesel fuels releases toxic gases that contribute to global warming and urban air quality deterioration. Traffic congestion in cities increases pollutant concentration, leading to respiratory problems and cardiovascular diseases.

Deforestation and Agricultural Activities: Deforestation reduces the number of trees that naturally absorb CO_2, leading to an increase in greenhouse gas concentrations. Additionally, agricultural practices such as burning crop residues, using chemical fertilisers, and applying pesticides release ammonia (NH_3), methane (CH_4), and other harmful gases into the atmosphere. Livestock farming also contributes significantly to methane emissions, further aggravating air pollution.

Natural Causes: While human activities are the primary contributors to air pollution, natural events like wildfires, volcanic eruptions, and dust storms also play a role. Wildfires release large amounts of carbon monoxide and fine particles into the air, affecting air quality over vast areas. Volcanic eruptions emit sulphur dioxide and ash, leading to temporary but severe pollution. Dust storms, especially in arid regions, carry fine particulate matter that reduces visibility and affects respiratory health.

EFFECT OF AIR POLLUTION ON HUMAN HEALTH

Air pollution poses severe health risks, affecting various bodily systems and leading to both short-term and long-term illnesses. As mentioned by numerous scholars including Manisalidis et al., (2020) prolonged exposure to polluted air has been linked to respiratory diseases, cardiovascular conditions, neurological disorders, and weakened immune function. Vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, and individuals with pre-existing health conditions, face the greatest risks.

Respiratory Diseases: One of the most immediate effects of air pollution is damage to the respiratory system (Santos, Arbex, Braga, Mizutani, Cançado, Terra-Filho & Chatkin, 2021). Pollutants like particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), and sulphur dioxide (SO_2) irritate the airways, leading to conditions such as asthma, chronic bronchitis, and lung infections. Long-term exposure to these pollutants can cause chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and increase the risk of lung cancer.

Cardiovascular Problems: Air pollution significantly affects the cardiovascular system by increasing the risk of heart attacks, strokes, and high blood pressure (Santos, Arbex, Braga, Mizutani, Cançado, Terra-Filho & Chatkin, 2021). Fine particulate matter can enter the bloodstream, leading to inflammation, blood clot formation, and reduced oxygen circulation. Studies have shown that

exposure to air pollution contributes to a higher incidence of heart diseases and premature deaths due to cardiovascular complications.

Neurological and Cognitive Impairment: Recent research has linked air pollution to adverse effects on brain function. Exposure to toxic air pollutants, such as heavy metals and fine particles, can contribute to cognitive decline, neurodevelopmental disorders, and an increased risk of diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's (Kilian & Kitazawa, 2018). Children exposed to high pollution levels may also experience reduced cognitive abilities and behavioural issues.

Weakening of the Immune System: Prolonged exposure to air pollution weakens the immune system, making individuals more susceptible to infections and diseases. Pollutants like ozone (O_3) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) can cause inflammation, reduce lung function, and impair the body's ability to fight off respiratory infections such as pneumonia and influenza.

REMEDIAL STRATEGIES OF AIR POLLUTION FOR A HEALTHY SOCIETY

Addressing air pollution requires a combination of policy measures, technological innovations, and community-driven efforts to create a healthier environment. Effective remedial strategies focus on reducing pollutant emissions, promoting sustainable practices, and increasing public awareness. By implementing these measures, societies can significantly improve air quality and protect public health.

Strengthening Environmental Regulations and Policies: Governments play a critical role in mitigating air pollution through the enforcement of strict environmental regulations (Wang, Liao, & Li, 2021). Policies such as emission control standards, vehicle exhaust regulations, and industrial pollution limits help reduce the release of harmful pollutants. Banning or restricting high-emission fuels and promoting clean energy alternatives further contribute to cleaner air.

Promoting Clean and Renewable Energy Sources: Transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydropower can drastically reduce air pollution levels (Millstein, O'Shaughnessy, and Wiser, 2024). Encouraging the adoption of clean energy technologies in industries, homes, and transportation systems lowers greenhouse gas emissions and improves air quality. Investments in energy efficiency and sustainable infrastructure also contribute to long-term pollution reduction.

Advancing Green Transportation Systems: Transportation is a major contributor to air pollution, and shifting towards eco-friendly alternatives can significantly reduce emissions. Expanding public transportation networks, promoting electric vehicles, and implementing cycling and walking-friendly urban designs can minimise the reliance on fossil fuel-powered vehicles. Carpooling and the use of biofuels also serve as effective strategies for reducing vehicular emissions.

Enhancing Public Awareness and Community Participation: Raising awareness about the dangers of air pollution and the importance of sustainable practices encourages individuals to adopt eco-friendly behaviours. Educational campaigns, tree-planting initiatives, and clean air advocacy programs help communities take an active role in reducing pollution. Encouraging responsible waste disposal and reducing the burning of waste materials further contribute to improved air quality.

Strengthening Technological Innovations for Air Quality Improvement: Developing and deploying advanced air filtration and pollution monitoring technologies can help track and control pollution sources. Innovations such as carbon capture systems, industrial scrubbers, and air-purifying green spaces in urban areas can significantly reduce the concentration of harmful pollutants (Bose, Bhattacharya, Kaur, and Chemudupati, 2024). Encouraging research in pollution control technologies ensures continued progress toward cleaner air.

CONCLUSION

Air pollution remains one of the most critical environmental and health challenges of the 21st century. As industrialisation and urbanisation expand, harmful pollutants continue to rise, worsening respiratory diseases, cardiovascular conditions, and ecological degradation. Both human activities and natural processes contribute to this crisis, demanding urgent intervention. Mitigation strategies, including policy reforms, technological advancements, and community-driven efforts, are essential to reducing pollution and protecting public health. A sustainable future requires collective action, scientific research, and global cooperation. Addressing air pollution effectively ensures a healthier environment for future generations while balancing economic development with ecological preservation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Governments should enforce stricter air quality regulations, including emission controls on industries and vehicles. Policies promoting clean energy adoption, carbon taxation, and sustainable urban planning should be prioritised to reduce pollution sources and protect public health.
- Investment in air purification technologies, renewable energy sources, and green transportation systems can significantly lower pollution levels. Research and innovation should focus on developing eco-friendly industrial processes and monitoring systems for real-time air quality assessment.
- Educational campaigns should inform individuals about air pollution's risks and encourage sustainable practices like reduced vehicle use, afforestation, and waste management. Community-driven initiatives, such as tree-planting programs and clean-air advocacy, can foster collective action for a healthier environment.

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