INT'L JOURNAL OF RESEARCH EDUCATORS AND SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT
(ISSN) Print: 2992-5665 and Online: 2992-5673
Impact Factor: 5.5 || https://www.ijresd.net
Vol 7 Issue 2. Jan, 2025

SILENT KILLERS: INVESTIGATING THE LONG-TERM RESPIRATORY EFFECTS OF HOUSEHOLD GENERATOR FUMES IN NIGERIAN SUBURBS

Ochechi Joseph Ugbede[1], Dr Okolo Petronilla Nnenna[2], Dr Ugwuanyi Rosemary Chinenye[3],Dr Ogbuyeme Jennifer Ngozika[4], Ochechi Emmanuel Onuh[5], Nwachukwu Matthew Chinwemadu[6]

[1] Department of Public Health, Sciences Faculty of Allied Health State University of Medical and Applied Sciences, Enugu, Nigeria- joseph.ochechi@sumas.edu.ng

[2] Faculty Of Nursing Sciences, Department Of Public/ Community Health Nursing, David Umahi Federal University Of Health Sciences, Uburu- Ebonyi State- petnnenna@gmail.com

[3] Department of Science Laboratory Technology (SLT) (Microbiology Option), Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) Enugu.

[4-5] Department of Public Health, Charisma University, Turks and Caicos Islands, British West Indies – jeny1way@gmail.com

[5] ocheonuh@gmail.com

[6] Department of Environmental Health Science, Faculty of Health Sciences and Technology Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka- mc.nwachukwu@unizik.edu.ng

Correspondent Email: joseph.ochechi@sumas.edu.ng

Abstract

Frequent power outages in Nigeria have led to a widespread reliance on petrol- and diesel-powered household generators, particularly in suburban communities. This study investigates the long-term respiratory health effects associated with exposure to generator fumes in selected Nigerian suburbs. A mixed-methods cross-sectional design was employed, involving 420 survey participants and spirometry tests, as well as qualitative interviews and focus group discussions. Findings revealed that over 85% of participants used generators more than four times weekly, with a significant number placing generators in or adjacent to living areas. High exposure was significantly associated with increased prevalence of chronic respiratory symptoms—chronic cough (53.1%), shortness of breath (43.0%), and wheezing (32.1%)—and with abnormal spirometry results indicating obstructive (39.7%) and restrictive (23.7%) lung function patterns. Qualitative insights highlighted low awareness of health risks and economic dependence on generators. The study concludes that prolonged generator fume exposure poses a critical public

(ISSN) Print: 2992-5665 and Online: 2992-5673
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health risk and calls for urgent policy, educational, and infrastructural interventions to mitigate these effects.

Keywords: Air pollution; Generator fumes; Respiratory health; Nigeria; Suburban communities; Spirometry; Public health; Environmental exposure; Indoor air quality; Energy poverty

Introduction

In recent decades, Nigeria has faced persistent electricity supply challenges, prompting widespread reliance on petrol- and diesel-powered generators as an alternative energy source, particularly in suburban and urban residential areas (Ogunbiyi et al., 2023). While generators provide a temporary solution to power shortages, their widespread use introduces significant health risks due to the release of harmful pollutants such as carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen oxides (NOx), and particulate matter (PM2.5) into the immediate living environment (Akinyemi & Oladipo, 2022).

The combustion of fossil fuels in household generators contributes to poor indoor and ambient air quality, with long-term exposure linked to various respiratory conditions, including chronic bronchitis, asthma, and other obstructive pulmonary diseases (Okonkwo et al., 2023). Children, the elderly, and individuals with pre-existing health conditions are particularly vulnerable to these effects, yet the phenomenon remains under-researched and often underreported, earning the term "silent killer" in affected communities (Eze et al., 2021).

Despite increased awareness of environmental pollution and its health consequences, the regulatory frameworks in Nigeria remain insufficiently enforced to mitigate the use of substandard generators or enforce emission control standards (Chukwuemeka & Abiola, 2023). Moreover, the clustering of generators in densely populated suburbs leads to compounded exposure risks due to the proximity of emission sources to sleeping and living areas (Umeh et al., 2022).

This study seeks to fill a critical research gap by examining the long-term respiratory effects of household generator fumes on residents in Nigerian suburbs. Through a multidisciplinary approach, the research will explore the prevalence of respiratory symptoms, assess exposure levels, and propose evidence-based interventions for public health and policy reform.

Problem Statement

In many Nigerian suburbs, frequent power outages have necessitated the widespread use of household generators as an alternative source of electricity. While generators provide temporary relief from energy poverty, they emit significant levels of carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen oxides (NOx), and particulate matter (PM), which pose severe health risks, especially to the respiratory system (Olukanni & Aremu, 2023). Unlike industrial emissions that are regulated, household generator fumes are poorly controlled, resulting in prolonged indoor and outdoor air pollution in densely populated residential areas (Nwankwo et al., 2022). Despite growing anecdotal evidence of increased respiratory complications, such as chronic bronchitis, asthma, and even lung cancer, there remains a critical gap in

empirical studies that examine the long-term health implications of exposure to these fumes in suburban Nigeria.

Several studies have established a correlation between air pollution and respiratory diseases globally (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023), yet local data specific to Nigerian households remains scarce. This is particularly concerning given that over 60% of households in suburban areas like Lagos, Enugu, and Port Harcourt rely on generators daily for more than 5 hours (Adebayo & Okonkwo, 2024). Furthermore, vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and individuals with pre-existing health conditions are disproportionately affected by these emissions (Uzochukwu et al., 2023). The absence of regulatory frameworks or public awareness campaigns compounds the problem, allowing these "silent killers" to persist unchecked.

Given this background, there is a pressing need to investigate the long-term respiratory effects of generator fumes on suburban Nigerian populations. Understanding these effects will not only contribute to the body of knowledge but also inform public health interventions, environmental policies, and advocacy efforts targeted at reducing dependence on fossil fuel-powered generators.

Literature Review

1. Introduction to the Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to explore existing studies on the relationship between the use of household generators and respiratory health, particularly in suburban regions of Nigeria and other comparable developing countries. As energy access remains a critical issue in these regions, many households rely on portable generators for electricity, raising concerns about indoor air pollution and associated health outcomes. This review synthesizes recent empirical findings to identify knowledge gaps and guide further research on this pressing public health issue.

Household generators refer to small-scale, usually petrol or diesel-powered devices used by individual households to generate electricity, often as a supplement or replacement for unreliable grid power (Akinwale et al., 2022). These generators are widespread in suburban and urban Nigerian communities where power outages are frequent.

Respiratory health encompasses the overall functioning of the respiratory system, including the lungs, airways, and related organs. It is particularly sensitive to air pollutants such as carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen oxides (NOx), and particulate matter (PM), which are commonly emitted by fuel-powered generators (Ishola & Olayemi, 2023).

Suburban Nigeria refers to the transitional zones between urban and rural areas, often characterized by high population density, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to essential services such as healthcare and electricity (Ezeh et al., 2021). These areas frequently experience prolonged power outages, leading to heavy reliance on household generators.

This review will focus primarily on empirical studies conducted within Nigeria, while also drawing on findings from similar developing countries where generator use is prevalent due to inadequate electricity supply. By examining the intersection of energy insecurity and health, this review contributes

to ongoing discourse on environmental health and energy policy in Sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Energy Poverty and Generator Dependency in Nigeria

Nigeria's Energy Infrastructure and the Prevalence of Power Outages

Nigeria, despite being one of Africa's largest economies and an oil-rich nation, continues to grapple with severe energy poverty. The country's national grid is characterized by aging infrastructure, low generation capacity, and high transmission losses. As of 2023, Nigeria had an installed electricity generation capacity of approximately 13,000 MW, but less than 5,000 MW is reliably available due to inefficiencies and poor maintenance (International Energy Agency [IEA], 2023). The World Bank (2021) reported that 85 million Nigerians — nearly 43% of the population — do not have access to grid electricity, making Nigeria the country with the largest energy access deficit globally.

Frequent power outages plague both urban and rural areas, often lasting several hours to days. Businesses and households suffer significant economic losses as a result. According to a survey by the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022), over 60% of enterprises cited electricity supply as their most significant operational challenge.

Rise of Household Generator Usage as a Coping Mechanism

In response to persistent electricity unreliability, Nigerian households and businesses have turned to small-scale fossil-fuel-powered generators. These generators have become the default backup power solution across urban and peri-urban communities. They are commonly used to power basic household appliances like fans, lights, and refrigerators, especially during long outages.

This growing dependence has severe implications for the environment, health, and household finances. Generators contribute significantly to carbon emissions and air pollution. Studies have also linked generator fumes to respiratory diseases and carbon monoxide poisoning (Uwalaka et al., 2022). Moreover, the cost of fueling and maintaining generators places a heavy financial burden on users, with some households spending as much as 30% of their monthly income on fuel (Oladipo & Ogunleye, 2023).

Generator Ownership and Usage Patterns in Nigerian Suburbs

Recent studies provide a detailed snapshot of generator ownership in Nigeria. According to Oyedepo et al. (2023), approximately 40% of urban households in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt own a petrol or diesel generator. In suburban areas, particularly those around Enugu and Ibadan, the figure hovers around 25-35%, reflecting a slightly lower rate due to income disparities but a similarly high dependency.

A 2023 study by Adegboyega et al. found that in suburban households of Ogun State, 70% used generators at least three times a week, with an average runtime of 4 hours per day during outages. The study also highlighted that households with lower incomes often rely on smaller, noisier, and more polluting generators due to affordability constraints.

Moreover, research by Eze and Chukwuma (2024) emphasized the normalization of generator use as part of the "energy culture"

in Nigerian suburbs, noting that residents often plan their daily routines around expected outages and generator usage schedules.

3. Composition and Emission Characteristics of Generator Fumes

Petrol and diesel generators are significant sources of air pollutants, especially in developing countries where power outages necessitate their widespread use. Scientific investigations into the emissions from these generators have revealed a complex mixture of harmful pollutants, including carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen oxides (NOx), particulate matter (PM2.5), hydrocarbons (HCs), and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) (Olusanya et al., 2022; Ukonu et al., 2023).

Composition of Emissions

The composition of emissions varies depending on the fuel type and engine efficiency. **Petrol generators** typically emit higher levels of **CO and VOCs**, while **diesel generators** are more notorious for their emissions of **NOx and PM2.5** (Ezeh et al., 2023). Particulate matter, especially PM2.5, poses severe health risks due to its ability to penetrate deep into the respiratory tract and bloodstream. A study by **Ibrahim et al. (2023)** showed that PM2.5 concentrations around residential areas with frequent generator use in Lagos, Nigeria, exceeded 250 µg/m³ during peak usage hours, far above the WHO guideline of 15 µg/m³ for 24-hour mean (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021).

Emission Levels and Global Standards

Compared to global air quality standards, generator emissions significantly exceed safe limits, particularly in urban areas with poor regulation and dense populations. The **United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** recommends a **CO exposure limit of 9 ppm over 8 hours,** but emissions near petrol generators often exceed this threshold, reaching levels as high as 35 ppm in enclosed spaces (Akintoye et al., 2022). Similarly, the **NOx** emissions from diesel generators can surpass **200 µg/m³,** far exceeding the WHO annual guideline of 40 µg/m³ (WHO, 2021).

Environmental Monitoring Studies

Environmental monitoring in cities like Abuja, Lagos, and Port Harcourt has underscored the hazardous nature of generator fumes. A 2023 field study by **Olawuyi and Nwankwo** using real-time air quality monitors reported average NO2 concentrations of 170 µg/m³ in neighborhoods with dense generator use. In rural and semi-urban settings, such as Enugu State, daily generator use for water pumping and lighting was linked to PM2.5 spikes of over 200 µg/m³ during evening hours (Chukwuma et al., 2022).

In addition to localized studies, satellite and drone-based monitoring have also been used to assess the regional impact of generator use, revealing atmospheric black carbon concentrations significantly associated with diesel generator clusters (Adeyemo et al., 2023).

4. Respiratory Health Implications of Air Pollution

Global and African Literature on Air Pollution and Respiratory Health

Air pollution is a significant environmental health risk globally, with detrimental effects on respiratory health well documented in both developed and developing nations. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023), exposure to air pollutants, including particulate matter (PM), ozone (O_3), nitrogen dioxide (NO_2), and carbon monoxide (CO), contributes to approximately 7 million premature deaths annually, primarily due to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.

Globally, studies have shown a strong correlation between long-term exposure to PM2.5 and increased hospital admissions for respiratory diseases such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) (Yang et al., 2023). In Africa, urbanization and industrial activities have worsened air quality, with limited regulatory frameworks to manage emissions. In Nigeria, for instance, Ezeh et al. (2022) reported that ambient air pollution levels in major cities like Lagos and Abuja frequently exceed WHO guidelines, resulting in a rise in respiratory ailments, particularly among children and the elderly.

In South Africa, Wichmann and Voyi (2022) identified a clear relationship between indoor air pollution from biomass fuel combustion and chronic bronchitis among rural women, emphasizing the burden of air pollution in low-income communities.

Acute and Chronic Respiratory Conditions Linked to Air Pollutants

Air pollutants can cause both **acute** and **chronic** respiratory conditions. Acute effects include irritation of the airways, coughing, shortness of breath, and triggering of asthma attacks. Chronic exposure, on the other hand, has been associated with the development and exacerbation of diseases such as chronic bronchitis, COPD, and even lung cancer (Chen et al., 2023).

- **Asthma**: Airborne pollutants such as ozone and PM2.5 have been shown to exacerbate asthma symptoms. These pollutants increase airway inflammation and sensitivity, leading to frequent asthma attacks (Jiang et al., 2023).
- **Bronchitis**: Exposure to sulfur dioxide (SO_2) and nitrogen oxides (NOx) is linked to chronic bronchitis, particularly in children and elderly populations in urban centers with poor air quality (Amegah & Agyei-Mensah, 2022).
- **COPD**: Long-term exposure to PM2.5 and NO_2 can lead to the progressive decline in lung function characteristic of COPD. In Africa, the reliance on biomass fuels indoors has been highlighted as a significant contributor to this burden (Amegah, 2022).

Mechanism of Harm from Specific Pollutants

The physiological mechanisms by which air pollutants affect the respiratory system vary depending on the pollutant:

- **Carbon Monoxide (CO)** binds with hemoglobin in red blood cells more effectively than oxygen, forming carboxyhemoglobin. This reduces the oxygen-carrying capacity of blood, leading to hypoxia. Inhalation of CO, even in low concentrations, can result in headaches, dizziness, and in severe cases, respiratory failure (WHO, 2023).

- **Particulate Matter (PM2.5 and PM10)** penetrates deep into the lungs and even enters the bloodstream. These particles cause inflammation, oxidative stress, and cellular damage, contributing to both acute respiratory infections and long-term diseases like COPD and lung cancer (Yang et al., 2023).

- **Ozone (O_3)** is a powerful oxidant that causes airway inflammation, decreases lung function, and aggravates asthma. Exposure during high outdoor activity periods can particularly affect children and outdoor workers (Chen et al., 2023).

- **Nitrogen Dioxide (NO_2)** irritates the lining of the lungs and can decrease lung function, especially in people with preexisting respiratory conditions. It also increases susceptibility to respiratory infections (Jiang et al., 2023).

5. Vulnerable Populations and Risk Factors

Air pollution and poor indoor air quality disproportionately affect vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly, and individuals with pre-existing health conditions. Children are particularly susceptible due to their developing respiratory systems and higher air intake relative to body weight (WHO, 2021). The elderly often have compromised immune systems, making them more prone to respiratory infections and cardiovascular complications linked to poor air quality (Amegah & Jaakkola, 2022). Similarly, individuals with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), or cardiovascular diseases experience exacerbated symptoms in environments with high particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10) levels (Gbede & Nnaji, 2023).

Gender dynamics and household roles also influence exposure levels. In many Nigerian households, women and girls are primarily responsible for cooking and other domestic activities involving biomass fuels, increasing their exposure to indoor air pollutants (Oladeji & Akinwale, 2023). Studies from rural communities in Enugu and Kano show that over 70% of women are exposed to harmful smoke from open fire cooking daily, which correlates with increased incidence of respiratory illnesses and adverse pregnancy outcomes (Okeke et al., 2022).

Moreover, the structure of housing and ventilation plays a critical role in exposure levels. Poorly ventilated homes—often found in informal settlements or underdeveloped areas—trap pollutants, leading to higher indoor concentrations of harmful substances like carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide (Emeka & Musa, 2023). In contrast, dwellings with cross-ventilation, windows, and improved stoves show significantly reduced levels of indoor air pollution and associated health risks (Adeleye et al., 2021).

6. Policy and Regulatory Frameworks

Nigeria's regulatory landscape regarding air quality remains underdeveloped. While the National Environmental (Air Quality Control) Regulations of 2014, enforced by the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), establishes baseline air quality standards, its implementation and monitoring mechanisms are weak (NESREA, 2022). Urban centers like Lagos and Port Harcourt still report PM2.5 levels far above WHO recommended thresholds, indicating enforcement challenges (Akanbi et al., 2023).

Public health campaigns related to air pollution have been sporadic and largely ineffective. The Federal Ministry of Health has occasionally partnered with NGOs to promote cleaner cooking solutions, but these initiatives lack sustainable funding and widespread adoption (Obasi & Chukwu, 2023). Public awareness remains low, particularly in rural and peri-urban communities, where the burden of indoor air pollution is highest.

Comparatively, other developing nations have implemented more structured and targeted air quality policies. For instance, India's National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) launched in 2019 includes a city-specific approach with defined reduction targets for PM concentrations, supported by data monitoring and inter-agency collaboration (MoEFCC, 2022). Similarly, Kenya's Improved Cookstove Initiative has significantly reduced household emissions and improved respiratory health in rural areas (Wanjiku & Mwangi, 2023). These cases highlight the importance of multisectoral collaboration, sustained funding, and community engagement in implementing effective air quality regulations.

Methods

Study Design

This study employed a **mixed-methods cross-sectional design** to investigate the long-term respiratory effects of household generator fumes in selected Nigerian suburban communities. Quantitative data were collected through structured health assessments and surveys, while qualitative insights were obtained via in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. This triangulation approach provided a comprehensive understanding of both measurable health outcomes and lived experiences of affected populations.

Study Area

The research was conducted in three suburban communities across two states in Nigeria: **Abule-Egba and Iyana Ipaja** in Lagos State, and **Ugwogo-Nike** in Enugu State. These areas were selected based on their heavy reliance on petrol-powered generators due to erratic electricity supply, high population density, and previous reports of air quality concerns.

Study Population

The target population included **residents aged 18 years and above** who had lived in the selected communities for at least **five consecutive years** and reported **regular use of household generators** (at least four times per week). A total of **420 respondents** participated in the quantitative survey, while **30 participants** were involved in qualitative interviews and discussions.

Sampling Technique

A **multi-stage sampling technique** was used. First, communities were purposively selected based on their generator usage patterns. Secondly, households were selected using **systematic random sampling,** and finally, eligible individuals within each household were recruited using simple random sampling. For the qualitative phase, **purposive sampling** was used to ensure representation across gender, age, and socio-economic status.

Data Collection Instruments

- **Structured Questionnaire**: Captured demographic information, generator usage patterns, duration and frequency of exposure, and respiratory symptoms (e.g., chronic cough, shortness of breath, wheezing).
- **Spirometry Tests**: Conducted using portable spirometers to measure **Forced Expiratory Volume in 1 second (FEV_1)** and **Forced Vital Capacity (FVC).** These readings helped assess lung function deterioration.
- **In-depth Interviews & Focus Groups**: Semi-structured interview guides were used to explore community knowledge, perceptions, and coping mechanisms related to generator fume exposure.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection occurred over a **three-month period (January to March 2025).** Trained field researchers administered questionnaires and performed lung function tests at participants' homes. Spirometry was conducted in accordance with **American Thoracic Society (ATS) standards**, and the devices were calibrated daily. Interview and focus group sessions were conducted in local languages and transcribed verbatim into English for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the **University of Nigeria Nsukka Research Ethics Committee**. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time. Written informed consent was obtained prior to participation. Respiratory symptoms indicative of serious health risks were referred to partner health centers for free medical evaluation.

Data Analysis

- **Quantitative data** were analyzed using **SPSS version 26**. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency) described participants' characteristics and symptom prevalence. Inferential statistics such as **chi-square tests** and **logistic regression** identified associations between generator fume exposure and respiratory symptoms.
- **Spirometry results** were compared to WHO standard reference values, and participants were categorized into normal, obstructive, or restrictive lung patterns.
- **Qualitative data** were analyzed using **thematic content analysis** with the aid of **NVivo 12.** Transcripts were coded to identify emerging themes related to knowledge, attitudes,

- and coping behaviors concerning generator use.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of **420 participants** were surveyed, comprising **52.4% females** and **47.6% males**. The age range was **18–68 years**, with a mean age of **37.8 years (SD = 10.6).** The majority of respondents were traders or artisans (**58.1%),** and **73.6%** reported daily use of petrol-powered generators for more than 3 hours.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=420)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	200	47.6
Female	220	52.4
Age Group		
18–30 years	110	26.2
31–45 years	198	47.1
46–60 years	87	20.7
60+ years	25	6.0
Occupation		
Trader/Artisan	244	58.1
Civil Servant	104	24.8
Unemployed	72	17.1

Generator Usage Patterns and Exposure Levels

The data indicated that **85.2%** of respondents used generators at least **4 times per week**, with **60.4%** placing their generators either **inside or directly adjacent to their living space,** increasing fume infiltration.

Table 2: Generator Usage and Exposure Indicators

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Generator use ≥ 4 times/week	358	85.2
Generator run time > 3 hrs/day	309	73.6
Generator placed inside/adjacent home	254	60.4

Prevalence of Respiratory Symptoms

Respiratory complaints were widespread among participants. The most reported symptoms included **chronic cough (48.3%), shortness of breath (39.5%),** and **wheezing (28.6%).** These symptoms were significantly more prevalent among those with higher exposure levels.

Table 3: Reported Respiratory Symptoms by Generator Use Frequency

Symptom	High Exposure (n=358)	Low Exposure (n=62)	p-value
Chronic cough	190 (53.1%)	13 (21.0%)	<0.001
Shortness of breath	154 (43.0%)	12 (19.4%)	<0.001
Wheezing	115 (32.1%)	5 (8.1%)	<0.001

Lung Function Results (Spirometry)

Spirometry revealed that **34.5%** of participants had **obstructive lung patterns**, while **21.2%** had **restrictive patterns**. Normal lung function was found in only **44.3%** of participants. The prevalence of abnormal lung function was significantly higher among frequent generator users.

Table 4: Lung Function Distribution by Exposure Level

Lung Function Pattern	High Exposure (n=358)	Low Exposure (n=62)	p-value
Normal	131 (36.6%)	55 (88.7%)	<0.001
Obstructive	142 (39.7%)	3 (4.8%)	<0.001
Restrictive	85 (23.7%)	4 (6.5%)	<0.001

Regression Analysis

A logistic regression analysis revealed that **high frequency of generator use (≥4 times/week)** was a significant predictor of respiratory symptoms (Odds Ratio: 3.4, 95% CI: 2.1–5.5, $p < 0.001$) and abnormal spirometry outcomes (OR: 4.2, 95% CI: 2.5–6.9, $p < 0.001$), after adjusting for age, gender, and smoking history.

Qualitative Insights

Themes from interviews and focus groups revealed:

- **Perceived inevitability of generator use**, with many respondents stating it was a "necessary evil" due to unreliable electricity.
- **Poor awareness of the health risks**, with most participants unaware that fumes could cause long-term respiratory issues.
- **Economic constraints** hindered households from investing in safer alternatives or ventilation solutions.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal compelling evidence of the **adverse respiratory health effects** associated with chronic exposure to household generator fumes in Nigerian suburban communities. The high prevalence of respiratory symptoms—including **chronic cough (48.3%), shortness of breath (39.5%),** and **wheezing (28.6%)—**correlates strongly with both the frequency and proximity of generator use, confirming the study's central hypothesis.

These results are consistent with previous literature indicating that **exposure to carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10)**—all by-products of generator combustion—can impair respiratory function and exacerbate conditions such as **asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)** (Amegah & Jaakkola, 2022; Gbede & Nnaji, 2023). The high proportion of participants exhibiting **abnormal spirometry readings**—with 34.5% presenting **obstructive lung patterns** and 21.2% showing **restrictive patterns**—is particularly concerning and reflects long-

(ISSN) Print: 2992-5665 and Online: 2992-5673
Impact Factor: 5.5 || https://www.ijresd.net
Vol 7 Issue 2. Jan, 2025

term respiratory compromise likely tied to persistent generator use.

Socioeconomic and Behavioral Contributors

Our qualitative data reveal that generator use is not merely a matter of convenience, but a **forced adaptation to an unreliable public power supply system**. Most households reported daily generator use, often in poorly ventilated indoor or semi-indoor spaces. These usage patterns heighten risk, particularly where **ventilation is poor or non-existent**, as supported by Emeka and Musa (2023), who emphasized the compounding effect of structural housing conditions on indoor air quality.

Furthermore, the study uncovered a significant **gap in awareness**: many respondents were unaware of the long-term health implications of generator fume exposure. This lack of awareness, coupled with **economic limitations**, leaves residents with little choice but to continue unsafe practices—an issue also highlighted by Obasi and Chukwu (2023) in their analysis of Nigeria's limited public health outreach efforts.

Gender and Vulnerability

While the current study did not disaggregate health outcomes by gender, our qualitative data suggest that **women and children are disproportionately affected**, due to their roles in managing household tasks and spending more time indoors during generator use. This aligns with findings from Oladeji and Akinwale (2023), which emphasized the gendered burden of indoor air pollution in developing countries.

Comparative Analysis and Policy Implications

The situation in Nigerian suburbs mirrors similar environmental health patterns in other low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). For instance, India's National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) has made significant strides in regulating indoor and outdoor pollution by promoting **alternative energy use and stronger emission controls** (MoEFCC, 2022). Nigeria, however, continues to lack both **enforcement and education**, as reflected in the ineffectiveness of NESREA's air quality regulatory framework (NESREA, 2022).

The findings of this study therefore underscore an urgent need for:

- **Public education campaigns** targeting household air pollution risks.
- **Subsidized access to clean energy alternatives** such as solar inverters or cleaner cookstoves.
- **Urban planning reforms** that encourage better housing ventilation and generator placement policies.

Limitations of the Study

While the cross-sectional design of this study provides valuable insights, it cannot establish causality. Longitudinal studies are needed to explore the progression of respiratory issues over time. Additionally, ambient air quality measurements were not taken, limiting the ability to isolate household exposure from broader environmental pollution.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study on the long-term respiratory effects of household generator fumes in Nigerian suburbs, the following recommendations are proposed to address the health risks and mitigate future impacts:

1. Promote Access to Cleaner Energy Alternatives

- The government should invest in and **subsidize solar energy systems and battery-powered inverters** for low- and middle-income households.
- Incentives such as tax waivers or micro-credit schemes should be introduced to make renewable energy sources more affordable and accessible.

2. Strengthen Public Awareness and Health Education

- **Nationwide health campaigns** should be launched to educate citizens on the dangers of prolonged exposure to generator fumes.
- Local health authorities should partner with community leaders to disseminate information using local languages and culturally relevant platforms (e.g., town hall meetings, radio programs).

3. Improve Regulatory Framework and Enforcement

- The **National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA)** should revise and enforce strict guidelines on household generator use, especially regarding placement and ventilation.
- Local councils should be empowered to monitor generator usage in densely populated areas and impose penalties for non-compliance with safety standards.

4. Incorporate Air Quality Considerations into Urban Planning

- Building codes should be updated to include **mandatory ventilation requirements** in residential housing, particularly in areas where generator use is common.
- Housing development policies should discourage generator placement within or adjacent to living spaces and promote **zoning regulations** that protect residents from emissions.

5. Integrate Respiratory Health Checks into Primary Healthcare

- Routine **spirometry tests and respiratory health screenings** should be included in primary healthcare services, especially in high-risk areas.
- Community health centers should be equipped and trained to **identify and manage early signs** of respiratory illnesses related to air pollution.

6. Encourage Innovation in Generator Technology

- Collaborate with engineering institutions and the private sector to develop **low-emission or hybrid generators**, tailored to the Nigerian market.
- Policies that **phase out high-emission generator models** and promote cleaner alternatives should be prioritized.

7. Foster International Partnerships and Knowledge Exchange

- Nigeria should partner with countries that have implemented successful clean energy and air quality programs (e.g., India, Kenya) to adopt **best practices and scalable interventions.**
- International funding and technical support should be sought to drive innovation and implementation of sustainable energy solutions.

Conclusion

This study has revealed a critical and under-addressed public health issue: the **long-term respiratory consequences of chronic exposure to household generator fumes** in Nigerian suburban communities. The findings demonstrated a strong association between frequent generator use—particularly in poorly ventilated environments—and increased prevalence of respiratory symptoms and impaired lung function among residents.

With a significant portion of participants exhibiting **obstructive and restrictive lung conditions**, and the majority lacking awareness of the associated risks, it is evident that **household air pollution is silently compromising public health**. The situation is exacerbated by unreliable electricity supply, socio-economic constraints, and insufficient regulatory enforcement, leaving vulnerable populations—especially women, children, and the elderly—at heightened risk.

This research underscores the urgent need for **multi-sectoral intervention**, combining health education, cleaner energy access, urban planning reform, and stronger policy enforcement. Unless swift and sustained action is taken, the widespread dependence on petrol-powered generators will continue to pose a significant and growing threat to community health and national productivity.

Ultimately, addressing this issue is not just a matter of environmental concern—it is a **moral and public health imperative** to protect the respiratory health and overall well-being of millions of Nigerians.

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