

ISSN: 0976-8031

Available Online at <http://www.recentscientific.com>

CODEN: IJRSFP (USA)

*International Journal of Recent Scientific Research*  
Vol. 10, Issue, 07(A), pp. 33353-33358, July, 2019

**International Journal of  
Recent Scientific  
Research**

DOI: 10.24327/IJRSR

## Research Article

### PREVALENCE OF ASTHMA IN CHILDREN UNDER 5 YEARS OLD EXPOSED TO AIR POLLUTION IN ABIDJAN, (CÔTE D'IVOIRE)

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24327/ijrsr.2019.1007.3655>

#### ARTICLE INFO

##### Article History:

Received 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2019

Received in revised form 15<sup>th</sup>  
May, 2019

Accepted 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2019

Published online 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2019

##### Key Words:

Air pollution; PM<sup>2.5</sup>; Children; Asthma.

#### ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** To examine the relationship of pollutants resulting from biomass combustion and the risk of asthma in children under five years in Yopougon municipality.

**Methods:** The study was done in 104 households located in 2 different sites, *Andokoi* and *Lubafrique* in Yopougon. The International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood questionnaire was used and the indoor and outdoor concentrations of PM<sub>2.5</sub> with device 3M EVM-7 were measured.

**Results:** Average indoors concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> (73 ± 9 µg/m<sup>3</sup> site Andokoi and 30 ± 5 µg/m<sup>3</sup> site Lubafrique) and outdoors (85 ± 8 µg/m<sup>3</sup> site Andokoi and 35 ± 3 µg/m<sup>3</sup> site Lubafrique) were above World Health Organization guideline for air quality. The prevalence of wheezing in the last 12 months among children under 5 years old at site Andokoi and Lubafrique were 18.3 % [95% CI (0.08 – 0.30)] and 18.2% [95% CI (0.06 – 0.28)] respectively. In addition, asthma symptoms at site A increased with the level of PM<sub>2.5</sub> regards to biomass burning. Logistics regression analysis found association between dry cough at night and outdoor concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> (OR= 1.01 [95% CI (1.001 – 1.020)]) and association between wheezing and indoor concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> (OR= 1.02 [95% CI (1.002 – 1.040)]) at site Andokoi but not at site Lubafrique. Nonetheless, no significant association was found between concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> and wheezing among children at the two sites.

**Conclusions:** Children under 5 years in Yopougon municipality are exposed to high level of PM<sub>2.5</sub> which can raise the asthma symptoms risks.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Household indoor air pollution associated with burning of biomass fuel for cooking and heating is responsible for 7 million deaths and particularly in which five hundred and forty-three thousand (543,000) deaths in children under 5 years annually<sup>1</sup>. Early childhood exposure to household indoor pollution increased the lifetime risk for developing acute respiratory tract infections, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease<sup>2,3</sup>. In low and middle income countries (LMICs), even in cities, a substantial fraction of the population lives in poor house and burning biomass fuel for cooking<sup>4,5,6,7</sup>. In sub-Saharan Africa, biomass fuels remain the main energy

source for 82 % of rural population and 60 % of urban population<sup>8</sup>. Biomass fuel combustion is responsible for the emission of toxics pollutants in air including particulate matter (PM), black carbon (BC), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH), etc.<sup>8,9</sup>. In most culture, women have the responsibility of home cooking activities and could be exposed to high level of pollutant during daily cooking<sup>10</sup>. Also, children were exposing to high level of pollutant when they were carried at the back or placed near their mother during the cooking period<sup>11,12</sup>. A systematic analysis in Africa found in sub-Saharan Africa, 13.9 % of asthma prevalence in children under 15 years<sup>13</sup>. There are some evidences of relationship between indoor air pollutants (bio aerosol, PM, NO<sub>2</sub>, PAH, etc...) and

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asthma/wheezing development, but the causal relationship remains inconsistent<sup>3</sup>. The previous study<sup>14</sup>, underlined the association between the onset of the cough in asthma group and PM<sub>2.5</sub>; and suggested that chemical and microorganisms absorbed on the surface of PM<sub>2.5</sub> played an important role in the development of asthma. In addition of PM<sub>2.5</sub>, the long-term exposure in early life to others pollutants such as ozone (O<sub>3</sub>), nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), etc. were also associated with asthma onset in children<sup>15,16</sup>. The diagnosis of asthma in children under 5 years of age is not reliable due to logistical, ethical and the variability of the wheezy illnesses<sup>17</sup>, but the associations between air pollutants and asthma onset remain positive<sup>15</sup>. Although, it is evidence that asthma and air pollutants are associated, those results are not consistent. In a study conducted in Nigeria, used the International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood (ISAAC) questionnaire and spirometry, two validated methods to diagnose asthma in children aged 5 to 11-years-old found the prevalence of wheezing ranged 6.4% to 8.7%<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, the results did not find a relationship between exposure to biomass smoke and asthma risk. In addition, another study conducted in Japan during air pollution episode didn't find an association between daily concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> and asthma<sup>18</sup>. Despite the negative results, all the studies suggested that children living in the house with poor air quality were more likely to develop respiratory infections<sup>19</sup>.

In Côte d'Ivoire, studies conducted by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation found that between 2005 and 2016, air pollution increased and became a threatening risk factor for death and disability among all age groups<sup>20</sup>. It is worth remembering that 8 864 490 inhabitants in 2015 rely on biomass (charcoal and wood) for cooking, although the government subsidies the butane gas<sup>21,22</sup>. We conducted a cross-sectional study to examine the relationship of pollutants resulting from biomass combustion and the risk of asthma in children under five years in Yopougon municipality (Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire).

## METHODS

This study assessed the PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations and children under 5 years old with respiratory health status living in the urban area of Yopougon municipality (Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire). We developed a methodology based on field investigation (Time-Activity Diary questionnaire, International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood questionnaire) and PM<sub>2.5</sub> daily measurements in each household.

### Study Design, and Participant's Recruitment

A cross-sectional study was conducted during one year at Yopougon municipality of Abidjan Côte d'Ivoire from August 2016 to August 2017 after the approval of the National Ethics Committee. 104 children under 5 years old within two neighborhoods in Yopougon municipality were enrolled using fisher's formula as previously described our study<sup>23</sup>. The choice of children under 5-year-old was done for several reasons. Firstly, Côte d'Ivoire's population is young (44% of the population is below 15 years old and 6% above 60). Secondly, since the official year for kids to attend school is 5 years, children below 5 are still staying at home. After informed consent from approved by their parents or tutors, a

questionnaire about child age, gender, cooking fuel and home location was filled.

In the two areas, indoor and outdoor PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations were measured with device 3M EVM-7.

### Data Collection

Questionnaires were administered to the mother in order to assess the children asthma status and respiratory symptoms using standard questionnaire validated from the International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood (ISAAC). In addition, Time-Activity Diary questionnaire was used to find the main location of children within the 24-hour time frame, characteristics of house and the fuel type used in the household. Daily indoor and outdoor concentrations of PM<sub>2.5</sub> were also measured. The key question used for assessing asthma symptom prevalence was: "Have you had wheezing or whistling in the chest in the last 12 months?".

### Statistical Analysis

STATA software version 15.0. was used for this study. Descriptive statistics were performed and the chi-square test was used to compare fuel consumption and mother's education level between the site Andokoi and Lubafrique. The relationship between asthma and PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations were analyzed.

Results were presented as odds ratios (OR) with 95% confidence intervals (CI). p-value less than 0.05 was considered significance.

## RESULTS

### Demographics and Housing Characteristics of the two sites

In total, 104 children aged 0 to 5 were enrolled in the study. Table 1 shows that, 60 % of children were enrolled for site Andokoi and 40 % for site Lubafrique. The sex ratio shows that 1.14 female were enrolled for site Andokoi while 1.44 male were enrolled for site Lubafrique. 80 % households used butane gas alone on site Lubafrique while 52 persons used butane gas and biomass on site Andokoi. In term of mother's education level, the result shows that 58 % have less than high school level for the two sites. The high rate of illiteracy recorded at site Andokoi (40 %), followed by site Lubafrique (23 %).

Daily concentrations of indoor and outdoor show an average more than 153 µg/m<sup>3</sup> which is higher than 25 µg/m<sup>3</sup> recommended by WHO at site Andokoi when households burnt biomass. Meanwhile, none of the household on site Lubafrique used biomass alone. Daily concentrations of indoor and outdoor carbon monoxide are lower in the two areas.

**Table 1** Demographic profile of 104 children and characteristics of households reported at the two sites

	Site Andokoi (N, %)	Site Lubafrique (N, %)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	28 (47)	26 (59)
Female	32 (53)	18 (41)
<b>Fuel consumption †</b>		
Butane gas	14 (23)	35 (80)
Butane gas and biomass *	31 (52)	9 (20)
Biomass	15 (25)	0 (0)
<b>Mother's education level**</b>		
Illiteracy	24 (40)	10 (23)
Less than high school	35 (58)	26 (59)
High school	1 (2)	8 (18)

Average daily indoor concentrations of PM <sub>2.5</sub> (µg/m <sup>3</sup> )		
Butane gas	73 ± 9	30 ± 3
Butane gas and biomass	129 ± 14	40 ± 8
Biomass	164 ± 35	-
Average daily outdoor concentrations of PM <sub>2.5</sub> (µg/m <sup>3</sup> )		
Butane gas	85 ± 9	35 ± 4
Butane gas and biomass	122 ± 14	68 ± 10
Biomass	153 ± 17	-
Average daily indoor concentrations of CO(ppm)		
Butane gas	0.9 ± 0.2	0.3 ± 0.1
Butane gas and biomass	2.4 ± 0.3	0.5 ± 0.2
Biomass	2.6 ± 0.5	-
Average daily outdoor concentrations of CO(ppm)		
Butane gas	2.3 ± 0.5	1.2 ± 0.3
Butane gas and biomass	3.0 ± 0.3	1.2 ± 0.2
Biomass	3.2 ± 0.5	-

†Fuel using was significantly associated with the sites (p < 0.001) using chi-square significant test

\*Biomass (charcoal and wood)

\*\*Mother's education level was significantly associated with the sites (p < 0.001) using chi-square significant test

### Description of the child's time-activity diary (TAD)

Survey results indicated that most children in the two sites spent more time in the bedroom than in other indoor environments in on site Andokoior site Lubafrique (Figure 1, 2). The daily time spent by a child in the bedroom was about 44% by the living room (26%) and the kitchen (1%). Thereby, it can be assumed that children between 0 and 5 years old in the two sites spent about 71% of their daily time in the indoor environments of the house (bedroom, living room, closed kitchen). Concerning the outdoor, 19 % spent their time on the balcony, playground, transport, market with mothers on site Andokoi or Lubafrique.

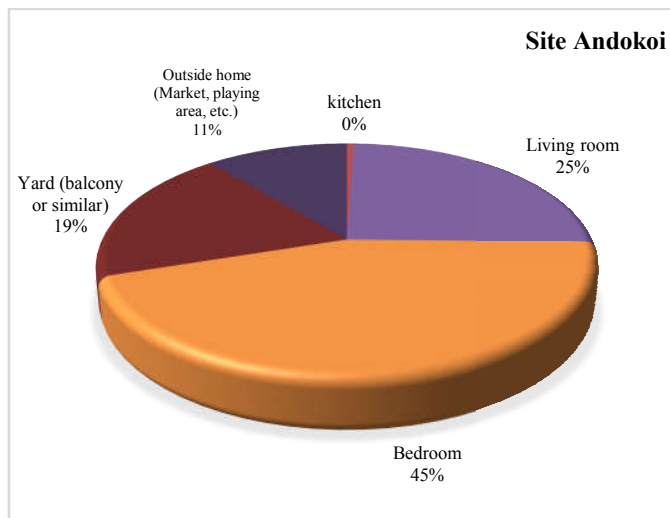


Figure 1 Daily average time of a 24-hours day spent by children under 5 years (n=60) in various area distribution in percentage (site Andokoi)

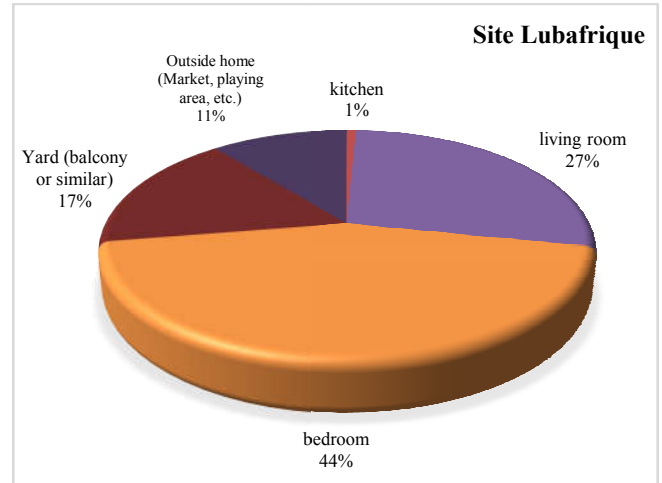
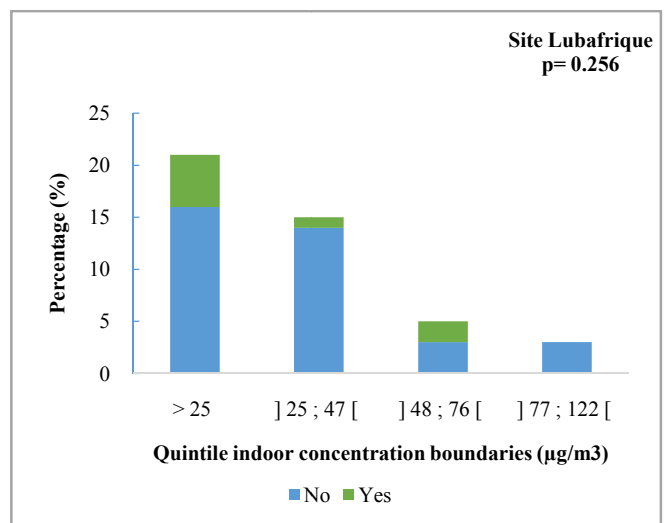


Figure 2 Daily average time of a 24-hours day spent by children under 5 years (n=44) in various area distribution in percentage (site Lubafrique)

### Prevalence of Asthma Related Symptoms by PM<sub>2.5</sub> Concentrations

Figures 3 and 4 show the proportion of asthma symptoms and PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations in indoor and outdoor by quintile. The prevalence of wheezing was almost similar at site Andokoi and Lubafrique (18.3 % [95% CI (0.08 – 0.30)] and 18.2% [95% CI (0.06 – 0.28)]). The study found that 11.4 % of children living in less polluted indoor housing (< 25 µg/m<sup>3</sup>) had wheezing and none suffer from wheezing in the most indoor polluted housing between 77 µg/m<sup>3</sup> and 122 µg/m<sup>3</sup> at site Lubafrique. Nonetheless, this observation showed a different trend with outdoor PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations wherewheezing was observed in all the proportion of PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations in indoor and outdoor quintile.

The asthma related symptoms at site Andokoi, increased with quintile of PM<sub>2.5</sub>. Indeed, the children exposure to high indoor and outdoor concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> had the highest proportion of wheezing or whistling in the chest (15.4 %). In addition, the highest proportion of a dry cough at night (23.3%; 25 %), was found among children exposed to high indoor and outdoor PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations.



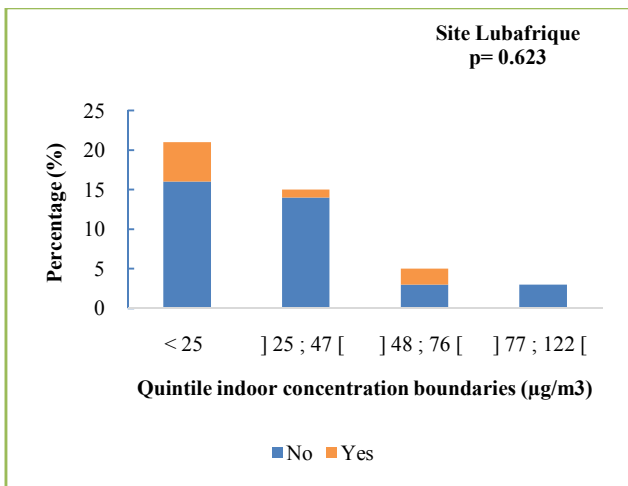


Figure 3 Proportion of child wheezing or whistling in the chest in the last 12 months by indoor and outdoor  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  concentrations at site Lubafrique

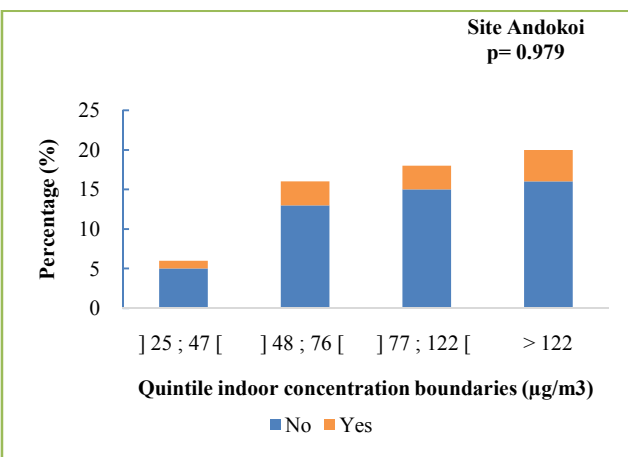
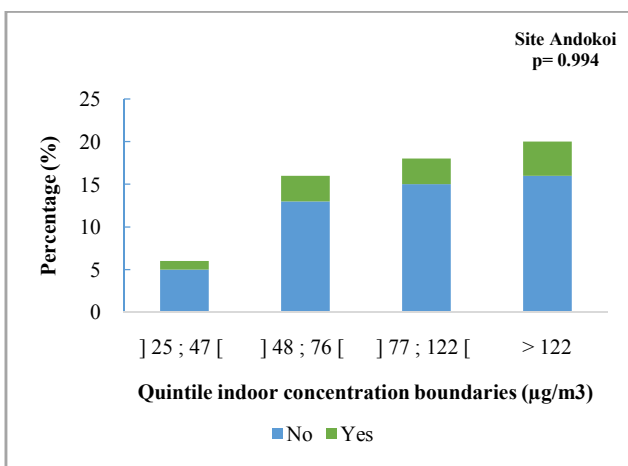


Figure 4 Proportion of child wheezing or whistling in the chest in the last 12 months by indoor and outdoor  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  concentrations at site Andokoi

**Multivariate Analysis**

In this study, positive correlation is found between dry cough at night and outdoor ( $r=0.38$ ) concentration of  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  on the one hand and the another hand between dry cough at night and outdoor concentration of carbon monoxide ( $r= 0.33$ ) at site Andokoi through Pearson correlation. Also, the multivariate analysis is used in order to examine the influence of covariates (gender, age, education) over the first correlation. Adjusted with the co-variables, the outdoor concentration of  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  in the model 1 was significantly associated with dry cough at night

only at site Andokoi ( $\text{OR}= 1.01[95\% \text{ CI } (1.001 - 1.020)]$ ). Outdoor concentration of  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  at site Andokoi increased the risk in children under five to get the dry cough at night.

The second analysis in the model 2 gave tree significant association between wheezing and study variables. Indeed, positive correlation is found between wheezing and indoor concentration of  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  ( $r=0.48$ ), wheezing and outdoor concentration of  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  ( $r=0.43$ ) and wheezing and indoor carbon monoxide ( $r=0,28$ ) at site Andokoi. Adjusted with the co-variables, the indoor concentration of  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  was significantly associated with dry cough at night only at site Andokoi ( $\text{OR}= 1.02 [95\% \text{ CI } (1.002 - 1.04)]$ ).

At the site Lubafrique, no significant correlation was found between dry cough at night either indoor or outdoor concentration of  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ .

**DISCUSSION**

Children under 5 year-olds at the two sites stay long hours (71 % of daily time) inside the house. Indoor and outdoor concentrations of  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  were higher than WHO air quality value recommended ( $25 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) and may raise the risk of asthma related symptoms in vulnerable population to air pollutants.

The daily time spent by the children in the bedroom was about 44%, followed by the living room (26%), the other area (balcony) (11 %) and the kitchen (less than 1%). This finding was similar in the two sites and did not depend on the site ( $p=0.16$ ). In high income countries (HICs), children spent 70-90% of the daily time in indoor environment<sup>24,25</sup>. In our study, children under 5 in the Yopougon municipality spent 70 % of the daily time in indoor which is similar to the HICs. To the best of our knowledge, no specific study in children under 5 concerning specific TAD has not been conducted.

Biomass burning in traditional stoves and kitchen poorly ventilated are the most indoor air pollution in LMCS<sup>26,27,28</sup>. Indeed, important concentrations of  $\text{PM}_{10}$  ( $611.3 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  to  $2656 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) were recorded in kitchens in Tanzania<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, high concentration of other pollutants such as CO,  $\text{NO}_2$ , VOC found in this microenvironment are an additional risk of exposure for women and children<sup>27,28</sup>. Although these studies revealed that kitchens were highly polluted by gases and particles during the biomass combustion, the results in Yopougon indicated that kitchens were less visited by children (0.5-0.7% of child time/day). Children exposure to indoor air pollution could be more frequent in other indoor environments. Result showed that children's bedroom was already identified as the greatest contribution to daily exposure to pollutants<sup>27</sup>. Also, the study found that the little time spent by children in kitchen and suggested that, mothers in urban area could be aware of risk of physical injuries and air pollution exposure to children.

The different levels of indoor and outdoor concentration of  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  at the two sites were not significantly associated with the presence of wheezing in the last 12 months, only with the dry cough at night at site Andokoi. The difference between the dry cough at night at site Andokoi and L may explain by the biomass fuel consumption and the low quality of housing at the site Andokoi. The previous study found that household characteristics (number of windows, kitchen location) increased only indoor concentration of  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  and biomass combustion increased both indoor and outdoor concentration of

PM<sub>2.5</sub> at both sites<sup>23</sup>. Consequently, biomass combustion and household characteristics were the risk factors that increased indoor and outdoor concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> and asthma related symptoms. Studies have already found the association between home quality in urban area and asthma symptoms. Insufficient ventilation in housing raised the level of indoor pollution which can trigger or exacerbate asthma<sup>29,30</sup>. In addition, the study done in Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso, showed similar proportion of biomass using (60 % of households) and the significant association between air pollution and the prevalence of acute respiratory infection (OR=14.703; CI 95%:1.156 - 186.887) among children under five<sup>31</sup>.

Although the study did not show an association between asthma and PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations of, as shown as the results of studies in Sri Lanka<sup>19</sup> and Quebec<sup>15</sup>, children living in the household with higher indoor PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations were more likely to have respiratory infections.

This survey result is consistent with previous studies which reported that children were vulnerable to air pollutants<sup>1</sup>, on the other hand the highest risk to develop respiratory diseases<sup>3,32,33</sup>. The strength of the study was to examine the health effects of exposure to indoor and outdoor concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> measured in two sites of house where children spent most of their time.

One limitation of the study was the diagnosis of asthma in the children under 5 which was not done due to the variability of the wheezy illnesses. Other limitation was the highest level of illiteracy which could have introduced the bias during the questionnaire administration which was minimized by the physician staff.

## CONCLUSION

The present study assessed the asthma related symptoms using the questionnaire validated from the International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood and examined the relationship between exposure to indoor and outdoor concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> resulting to fuel combustion. The assessment was done in 104 households located in two residential sites, one was closer to an industrial area (*Andokoi*) and the other was far from the industrial area (*Lubrafrique*) in Yopougon (Côte d'Ivoire). The questionnaire and measurement data used to evaluate asthma related symptoms in children under 5 exposed to various levels of indoor and outdoor concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> at the two sites. In this study, biomass burning was significantly associated with the poor ventilation and increased the indoor and outdoor concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> which had already been polluted (WHO 25 µg/m<sup>3</sup> per day). Consequently, asthma related symptoms at site Andokoi, increased with indoor and outdoor concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub>. However, the study did not find any relationship between wheezing or whistling in the chest in the last 12 months and indoor and outdoor concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> at the two sites. Nevertheless, the asthma related symptoms increased with indoor and outdoor concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub>. From this study, we can suggest that using the butane gas reduced indoor and outdoor concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> and the risk of asthma related symptoms. The future work is going to be a longitudinal study. The diagnostic methodology of asthma will be the validated questionnaire ISAAC and spirometry to minimize misclassification.

## Acknowledgements

This study was supported by the grant N° 107347-001 of Ecohealth Chair "Urban Air Pollution and Noncommunicable Diseases (ChairePol) and International Development Research Center (IDRC). We would like to thank the field-workers and Eco-Health staff for their technical support.

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**How to cite this article:**

Kouao Ahua Kouassi René., 2019, Prevalence of Asthma in Children Under 5 Years old Exposed to air Pollution in Abidjan, (Côte D'ivoire). *Int J Recent Sci Res.* 10(07), pp. 33353-33358. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24327/ijrsr.2019.1007.3655>

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