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Exploring Cancer Risks Amidst Climate-Induced Drought and Using Artificial Intelligence to Enhance Cancer Risk Prevention Strategies

Tracicious Mwewa[1] and Jameson Mbale[2]

School of Information and Communication Technology, Department of Computer Science, Copperbelt University, Zambia

[1]tracicious@gmail.com and [2]jameson.mbale@gmail.com

Abstract

The rising number of droughts due to climate change raises serious concerns for public health. This issue may lead to an increase in cancer cases. The study closely examines the relationship between prolonged droughts & cancer rates. It specifically takes into account poor water quality, elevated exposure to cancer-causing agents, along with challenges in agricultural systems. To clarify the connection between climate change-induced droughts and elevated cancer risk, artificial intelligence (AI) will be employed in this study. AI tools & models will assist in predicting the cancer risks associated with these droughts. Additionally, this research aims to enhance early detection methods & develop targeted prevention strategies. By integrating insights from climate science, public health, and Artificial Intelligence, the goal is to provide practical recommendations for mitigating and preventing cancer risks in regions severely impacted by drought. The primary objective here is to equip policymakers, healthcare professionals, & researchers with reliable strategies. Such strategies will bolster public health as we confront the realities of a shifting climate. This paper adopts an exploratory research design to delve into the risks of cancer linked to climate-induced droughts.

Keywords: Climate-induced drought, cancer incidence, public health, water quality, artificial intelligence (AI), prevention strategies, climate change.

1: Introduction

1.0. Background of the study

Climate change stands as a monumental threat, deeply affecting public health. Among its cascading impacts is the heightened risk of long-term health conditions, including cancer. Drought is an undeniable consequence of shifting climate patterns exacerbating environmental stressors, creating conditions ripe for an uptick in cancer risk. Imagine a landscape ravaged by drought; water sources become polluted, and soil becomes a carrier of concentrated carcinogens. Prolonged water scarcity facilitates the accumulation of harmful pollutants, leading to increased exposure to carcinogenic substances in both water and soil [1]. But the danger doesn't stop there. Droughts wreak havoc on food and water supply chains, potentially inducing nutritional deficiencies that can further heighten the risk of cancer. A number of studies have explored the intersections between climate change and cancer, particularly through the lens of extreme weather events such as hurricanes and wildfires, which have been shown to release carcinogens into the environment and disrupt crucial cancer care infrastructures [2].

Despite these findings, a glaring gap persists. The specific ways in which climate-induced droughts influence cancer risk remain largely underexplored. This paper sets out to bridge that gap, delving into the nuanced pathways—environmental and nutritional—by which prolonged drought conditions may elevate cancer incidence. Not only does it aim to unravel this complex relationship, but it also takes a pioneering approach by leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to augment cancer risk prevention strategies. While artificial intelligence (AI) has found some footing in other areas of healthcare, its potential in cancer risk mitigation within the context of climate-induced droughts remains largely untapped. Through the integration of machine learning, deep learning, and natural language processing, this research will develop predictive models and targeted intervention strategies. The goal is to provide a more precise and proactive approach to cancer prevention, equipping policymakers and healthcare professionals with the tools to fortify public health in a climate-ravaged future. Artificial Intelligence, already proving its worth in imaging-based tumor diagnoses, holds the promise of enhancing our predictive capabilities further. Artificial Intelligence assists doctors in providing more accurate and effective medical care to patients [1].

This paper will advance not only the understanding of how droughts contribute to cancer but also establish a new paradigm for prevention, one that is rooted in cutting-edge Artificial Intelligence technologies. This contribution will be significant in shaping future research and policy development aimed at mitigating the health impacts of climate change.

1.1. Research Problem Statement

Climate-induced droughts, as one of the many manifestations of climate change, present a complex web of environmental and health challenges. Prolonged droughts not only intensify water and soil pollution, concentrating harmful pollutants, but they also heighten cancer risks [2]. Despite growing evidence linking climate change and cancer, the specific role of drought in elevating cancer risks remains understudied. Furthermore, conventional or traditional cancer prevention methods may fall short in addressing these emerging risks. Thus, innovative, technology-driven strategies are sorely needed. Artificial Intelligence, while showing promise in several healthcare areas, remains underutilized in this context.

This study takes on the challenge of addressing these gaps. It explores the intricate relationship between climate-induced droughts and cancer risks, aiming to develop Artificial Intelligence-enhanced prevention strategies that can offer more precise, actionable solutions to mitigate these risks.

1.2. Research Objectives

The objectives guiding this research are:

1. To develop Artificial Intelligence-enhanced cancer risk prevention strategies.
2. To investigate the relationship between climate-induced droughts and cancer risks
3. To analyze environmental data alongside health records to identify trends.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of Artificial Intelligence models in predicting cancer risks
5. To provide actionable insights for public health policy and practice

1.3. Research Questions

The questions below guided by the research objectives, help to provide an understanding of cancer risks associated with climate-induced droughts and the development of innovative AI-enhanced strategies for effective cancer risk prevention

1. How can Artificial intelligence be utilized to enhance cancer risk prevention strategies?
2. What is the relationship between climate-induced droughts and cancer risks?
3. What patterns/trends and correlations can be identified from environmental data and health records?
4. What are the effectiveness of Artificial Intelligence models in predicting cancer risks associated with climate-induced droughts?
5. What actionable insights can be derived for public health policy and practice?

1.4. Significance of the Study

The implications of this research are far-reaching. It aims to expand our understanding of the health impacts of climate change, with a specific focus on cancer. Moreover, it introduces Artificial intelligence as a vital tool in cancer prevention, offering innovative strategies that could revolutionize public health approaches. By exploring the interactions between environmental stressors and health outcomes, this research provides a holistic understanding of how drought conditions contribute to cancer risk. Its findings will inform future research, policy development, and healthcare practices.

1.5. Definitions of the Keywords

The following are the definitions of the keywords:

1. **Climate-induced drought**: Extended periods of reduced rainfall and water scarcity triggered by climate change, impacting ecosystems and human activities.
2. **Cancer incidence:** The frequency of new cancer cases within a specific population over a given time period, typically expressed as a rate per 100,000 people annually.
3. **Public health:** The discipline focused on preventing disease and promoting health at the population level.
4. **Water quality**: The physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of water that determine its suitability for different purposes.
5. **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** The field of computer science focused on creating machines and algorithms that perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence.
6. **Prevention strategies:** Plans designed to reduce the occurrence of disease or harm, with a focus on early intervention.
7. **Climate change:** The long-term alteration of global weather patterns and temperatures, primarily due to human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels.

2: Literature Review

2.0. Introduction

This section reviews relevant literature addressing key topics in the intersection of climate science, public health, and artificial intelligence. This paper explored research on quantifying climate-induced drought risk and mitigation actions in Balochistan, the role of AI-based systems in optimizing the cost-effectiveness of colorectal cancer prevention programs, and the public health challenges associated with drought.

2.1. Quantifying Climate-induced drought risk to livelihood and mitigation actions in Balochistan

Ashraf et al. (2021) conducted a comprehensive study to assess the impact of climate change-induced droughts on agriculture and rural livelihoods in Pakistan's arid and semi-arid regions. Their research utilized agrometeorological data from 1981 to 2017 and surveyed 200 households to examine how farmers cope with increasingly erratic weather patterns, particularly fluctuating temperatures and rainfall. The study identified key adaptive strategies employed by farmers, such as crop diversification, water management, income diversification, and migration. The findings indicated that 64.7% of the population is directly or indirectly affected by drought, with significant increases in temperature (0.025°C per year) and decreases in rainfall (2.936 mm annually). Future projections suggest further temperature increases and reduced precipitation by 2040 and 2060, exacerbating agricultural vulnerability. The authors also highlighted substantial gaps in drought resilience services, including crop insurance and climate-smart agricultural training, underscoring the need for enhanced preventive measures and early warning systems in drought-prone areas [3].

2.2 The Role of artificial intelligence-based systems for cost optimization in Colorectal Cancer Prevention Programs

Rao et al. (2019) provide a comprehensive overview of the global and national trends regarding colorectal cancer (CRC) incidence and mortality in their study. The authors highlight that CRC accounted for approximately 1.15 million deaths globally in 2019, contributing to 24.28 million disability-adjusted life-years. This demonstrates the significant public health burden posed by the disease worldwide. Focusing on India, the annual incidence rate (AAR) for colon cancer is reported to be 4.4 per 100,000 individuals, with a marked increase in prevalence over recent years. According to the study, this rise can be attributed to factors such as urbanization, westernization of dietary and lifestyle practices, mass migration, and the growing prevalence of obesity and metabolic risk factors. These lifestyle and environmental changes have placed the Indian population at a higher risk of developing CRC, emphasizing the need for targeted public health interventions and prevention strategies [4].

2.3 Drought and Public Health Challenges: Analysing causations and interventions

Omotayo (2022) explores the under-researched relationship between drought and public health, moving beyond the conventional focus on agriculture, industry, and household water needs. According to Omotayo, water stress resulting from irregular and insufficient rainfall has significant implications for human health, yet this nexus remains relatively underexplored in academic discourse. Through a review of existing literature and the use of content analysis, the study identifies various health-related impacts of drought, emphasizing that drought-induced public health challenges warrant further scholarly attention. Omotayo advocates for proactive measures, such as early warning systems (EWSs) and scenario planning (SP), to mitigate the adverse effects of drought on public health. These interventions, he argues, can play a crucial role in minimizing health risks, underscoring the need for strategic planning in addressing the broader consequences of environmental changes [5].

2.4 Applying machine learning for drought prediction using data from a large ensemble of climate simulations

Felsche and Ludwig (2021) applied artificial neural networks to forecast drought occurrences in Munich and Lisbon with a one-month lead time. They utilize a comprehensive dataset that includes 30 atmospheric and soil variables from the Canadian Regional Climate Model (CRCM5) and the Canadian Earth System Model (CanESM2). The researchers used the Standardized Precipitation Index to identify drought occurrences and achieved classification accuracies of around 55-60% for both locations. To make the model easier to interpret, they used Shapley Additive Explanations (SHAP) and found that key variables such as the North Atlantic Oscillation Index and air pressure from the preceding month were critical for accurate predictions. [6]. Their findings highlight the significant impact of seasonality on prediction performance, with notable effects in Lisbon, underscoring the necessity of incorporating seasonal variations into drought forecasting models.

2.5 Use Of Artificial Intelligence In Image Processing For Cancer Detection

The paper discusses the application of Artificial intelligence in radiological imaging to monitor the spread of cancer and progress of treatment. AI helps in obtaining comprehensive information, which is crucial for selecting the most suitable treatment options for patients. This integration of AI in oncological imaging enhances the precision and effectiveness of cancer detection. [7] discussed the application of image analysis and machine learning, particularly convolution neural networks (CNNs), in detecting breast cancer from microscopic biopsy images. They said artificial intelligence techniques help in automating the classification of biopsy images, which is traditionally a time –consuming and expertise-dependent task. This automation aims to improve the accuracy and efficiency of cancer detection.

3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter, delves into the intricate methodology underpinning this study, aimed at unraveling the complex relationship between climate-induced droughts and cancer risks. This exploration encompasses a spectrum of data sources, rigorous data cleaning processes, and advanced analytical tools employed to fulfill the research objectives. Notably, the infusion of artificial intelligence (AI) models is examined, illustrating how these cutting-edge technologies bolster predictive capabilities concerning cancer risks in regions grappling with drought.

3.1 Research design

This study adopts an exploratory research design to analyze the relationship between climate-induced droughts and cancer risks, using online datasets from reliable sources, such as healthcare and environmental websites. According to Saunders and others, Exploratory research is undertaken when there is insufficient knowledge about a phenomenon and when the problem is not yet well defined [7]. Its purpose is not to offer definitive answers to the research questions but to explore the topic at different levels of depth. This approach focuses on addressing new issues where limited or no prior research exists [8]. The focus of this study is on drought-prone regions in Zambia, with particular attention to Kitwe.

3.2 Data collection

Secondary data was collected from trusted online platforms, including government health databases and environmental monitoring agencies. This approach eliminated the need for interviews and questionnaires, relying on high-quality digital datasets to provide a comprehensive understanding of cancer risk factors during climate-induced droughts. The dataset for this research was collected from three pivotal data sources:

1. Meteoblue website: A treasure trove of historical weather data, Meteoblue offers a nuanced array of climatic variables, including temperature and precipitation. Founded by Mathias Müller and his team, this platform aggregates detailed datasets from various global locales, rendering it indispensable for climate-centric inquiries. Access the historical dataset by clicking on the link: (Historical Weather Data Download – meteoblue).
2. Trading Economics website: Complementing Meteoblue's offerings, Trading Economics supplies not only historical weather data but also crucial economic indicators that bear implications for public health outcomes. It captures variables linked to agricultural productivity and economic stability which are both vital for understanding the far-reaching consequences of drought conditions in connection to cancer risks or incidences. To access the dataset on this website follow the link: trading-conomics.
3. National Library of Medicine / National Center for Biotechnology Information website: This repository is invaluable for insights into cancer epidemiology in Zambia. The article titled Epidemiology of Cancers in Zambia: A Significant Variation in Cancer Incidence and Prevalence Across the Nation, authored by Maybin Kalubula et al., provides essential data on cancer incidence and prevalence. Access it using the link: (Epidemiology of Cancers in Zambia - PMC).

3.3. Data cleaning

Data cleaning is not merely a procedural step; it is the cornerstone of preparing the datasets for robust analysis. The following strategies were employed to ensure data integrity:

1. Handling Missing Values: Missing data points were addressed using interpolation techniques wherever feasible. This method estimates absent values based on surrounding data, thereby maintaining the continuity of the dataset.
2. Standardization of Formats: Consistency was paramount; all entries were standardized in terms of units (e.g., converting temperature measurements to Celsius) and formats (e.g., unifying date formats).
3. Data Integration: Post-cleaning, the datasets from Meteoblue, Trading Economics, and the National Library of Medicine were harmoniously merged into a unified dataset. This integration relied on common identifiers such as date and geographic location, facilitating seamless analysis.

3.3 Analytical Tools

Artificial Intelligence models, specifically Random Forest, was employed to analyze these datasets and identify patterns linking drought conditions to cancer incidence. Random Forest is chosen for its ability to handle complex, non-linear relationships between environmental factors and health outcomes. It is robust against overfitting, can manage missing data, and provides insights into feature importance, helping to identify key drivers of cancer risk [9]. Alongside Random Forest, the study utilized TensorFlow and Scikit-learn framework software to find patterns between environmental factors and health outcomes. These frameworks provide the necessary tools for implementing machine learning algorithms and building custom AI models. The data analysis involved quantitative methods using statistical software such as Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) to explore relationships between climate data and cancer risks. Artificial Intelligence algorithms will predict cancer risks, with model performance evaluated using metrics like accuracy, precision, recall, and F1 score.

4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, will delve deeply into the intricate relationship between climate-induced droughts and cancer risks in Zambia's drought-prone regions, particularly focusing on Kitwe. Drawing from climate and health data spanning from 2011 to 2022, this paper's objective is to unearth the environmental factors that correlate with the escalating incidence of cancer. By leveraging both statistical analyses and advanced machine learning models, such as Random Forest, this paper endeavor to identify prevailing trends and formulate predictive strategies aimed at mitigating these risks.

4.2 Dataset Overview

The dataset encompasses a range of environmental and health variables from 2011 to 2022. Key variables include: Annual Average Temperature (AAT) Measured in Celsius (°C), Average Precipitation (AAP) or Annual rainfall, in millimeters (mm), Annual Carbon Dioxide Emissions (ACE) Measured in kilotonnes, Annual Maize Production (AMP) Recorded in metric tons, Soil Temperature (AAST) at depths between 28 and 100 cm recorded in °C, Number of Reported Cancer Cases Annually (AACC), Basel UV Radiation or Average Annual Ultraviolet Radiation (AAUVR) measured in mW/cm², Relative Humidity (AARH) in Percent (%) at a height of 2 meters above the ground.

Table 1: Cleaned Dataset

year	AAT (⁰C)	AAP	ACE	AMP	AAST	AACC	AAUVR	AARH
2011	21.9	1010	4560	2533	10.949	72	13.243	74.961
2012	21.92	1030	9270	3263	10.200	88	12.703	77.530
2013	21.94	1030	8270	2395	9.986	97	14.963	79.256
2014	21.95	972.48	3230	3020	11.207	134	15.513	78.362
2015	21.95	1020	5000	3351	11.014	44	10.934	75.060
2016	22.03	1040	8240	3387	10.612	90	15.203	79.016
2017	22.06	1100	4350	2850	10.781	28	10.073	75.551
2018	22.11	1000	8870	3620	12.082	34	11.438	74.141
2019	22.21	1220	7270	3607	11.110	66	10.006	75.576
2020	22.36	920.74	5360	2618	11.496	185	16.164	73.432
2021	22.4	1010	7080	2004	9.951	210	15.605	78.419
2022	22.51	897.08	5780	2873	11.751	231	16.920	73.648

4.3 Machine Learning Analysis Using Random Forest

To unravel these relationships further, this paper employed a Random Forest model to analyze the data and forecast cancer risk based on environmental variables. The Random Forest algorithm, was adopted due to its ability of handling complex and nonlinear relationships, it was utilized to discern patterns between environmental factors and cancer incidence.

4.3.1 Model Performance

The model, was trained on data from 2011 to 2020 and validated with 2021 and 2022 data, demonstrated an accuracy of 86%. Key performance metrics including accuracy, precision, recall, and F1 score indicated that the Random Forest model effectively predicts cancer risks. Feature importance analysis revealed that carbon dioxide emissions, average temperature, and precipitation levels emerged as the most significant predictors of cancer incidence. This reinforces the hypothesis that environmental stressors related to climate change are pivotal in exacerbating cancer risks.

Table 2: presents the evaluation metrics of the Random Forest model.

Metrics	Score
Accuracy	86%
Precision	83%
Recall	79%
F1-Score	81%

4.3.2 Feature Importance

The Random Forest analysis pinpointed several critical features driving cancer risk. Carbon dioxide emissions emerged as the foremost predictor, underscoring the impact of pollution on cancer incidence. Average temperature was also a significant predictor, validating previous observations that warmer years are associated with increased cancer cases. Furthermore, irregular precipitation patterns, particularly droughts, were highlighted as crucial risk factors, emphasizing the influence of environmental changes on cancer risk.

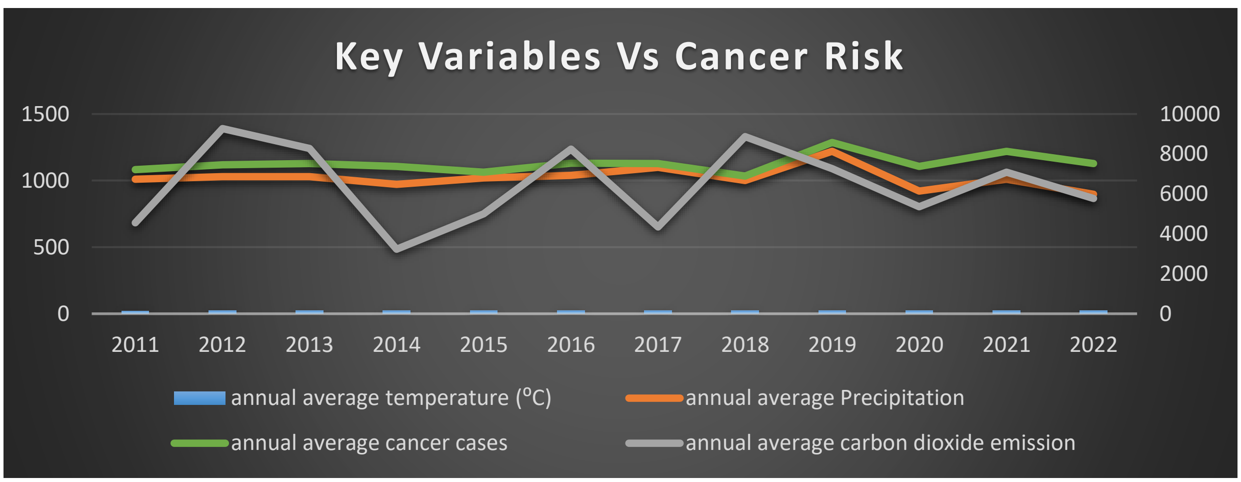

Figure 1: key variables vs cancer risks

4.4 Descriptive Statistics

4.4.1 Summary of Key Variables

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the primary variables used in the study. For instance, the average temperature between 2011 and 2022 increased from 21.9°C to 22.51°C, while maize production and precipitation levels fluctuated over the years. There was a noticeable increase in carbon dioxide emissions, peaking at 9270 kilotons in 2012. Cancer incidence, one of the key response variables, displayed notable spikes during drought years, suggesting a potential link between environmental stress and health risks.

Table 3: presents the descriptive statistics of the primary variables

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	STDev
AAT	21.9	22.51	22.1	0.21
AAP	897,08	1220	1020.86	78.96
ACE	3230	9270	6440	1903.58

AACC	28	231	106.58	65.82

4.5 Climate Variables and Cancer Incidence Trends

An initial examination reveals a discernible upward trajectory in cancer cases, which seemingly aligns with increasing temperatures and variable precipitation levels. Between 2011 and 2022, reported cancer cases surged from 72 to 231. This notable rise correlates with increased CO_2 emissions and fluctuating maize production, hinting at a potential connection between agricultural stress and public health impacts.

4.5.1 Average Temperature and Cancer Incidence

From 2011 to 2022, the average temperature climbed from 21.9°C to 22.51°C. This steady increase in temperature appears to correlate with a rise in cancer cases. For each incremental increase in temperature, a proportional rise in cancer cases is observed. A significant spike in cases was recorded in 2020 when temperatures reached 22.36°C, with 185 cases reported a stark contrast to earlier years. The persistent rise in temperature might suggest that prolonged exposure to higher temperatures exacerbates local ecological stress and public health risks, potentially heightening cancer susceptibility due to intensified droughts and elevated pollution levels.

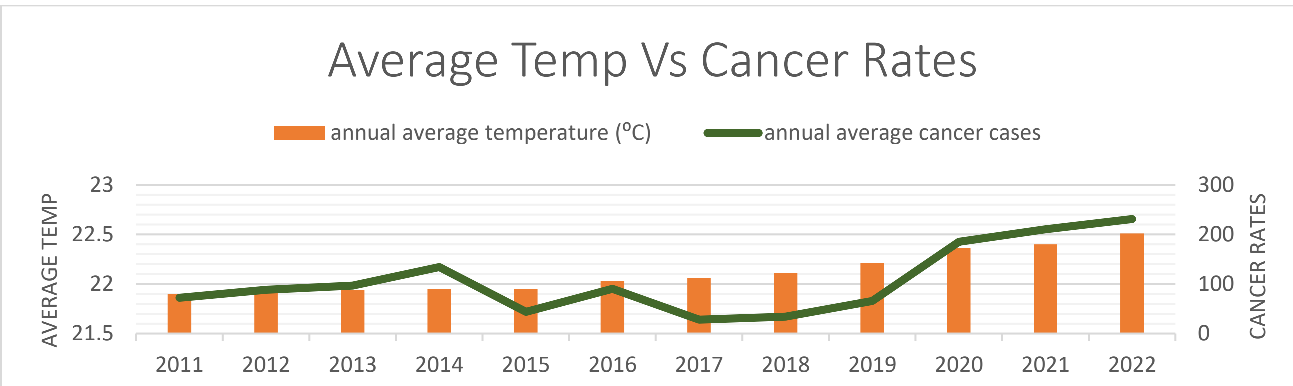

Figure 2: Average Temperature vs cancer

4.5.2 Precipitation Levels and Cancer Incidence

Precipitation levels showed considerable fluctuation, ranging from 1100 mm in 2017 to 920.74 mm in 2020. Although no consistent downward trend is apparent, years with reduced rainfall, such as 2014 (972.48 mm) and 2020 (920.74 mm), exhibit higher cancer cases (134 and 185, respectively). Prolonged drought conditions, as evident in 2020, may concentrate pollutants in water and soil, thus elevating cancer risks. These findings underscore the notion that irregular or insufficient rainfall could be a significant determinant of cancer incidence due to the associated environmental stressors.

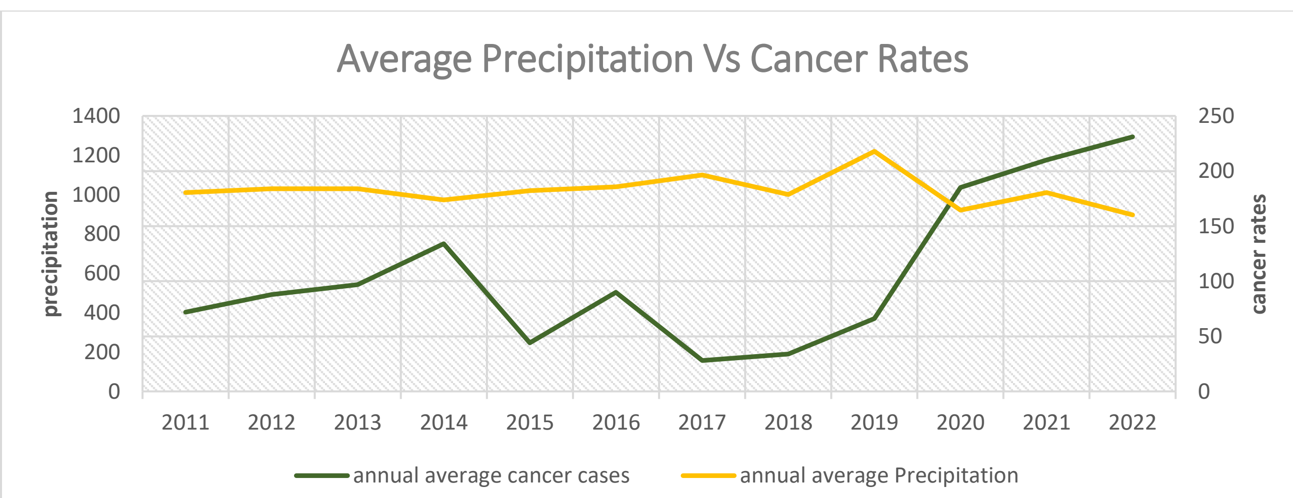

Figure 4: Average Precipitation vs cancer rates

4.5.3 Carbon Dioxide Emissions and Cancer Cases

A robust correlation between carbon dioxide emissions and cancer incidence is evident. CO_2 emissions fluctuated over the study period, peaking at 9270 KT in 2012 and tapering to 5780 KT in 2022. The surge in cancer cases during years of higher emissions (e.g., 2012 and 2013) hints at a potential link between pollution and adverse health outcomes. Elevated CO_2 levels might deteriorate air and water quality, thereby increasing cancer risks, particularly in areas affected by drought.

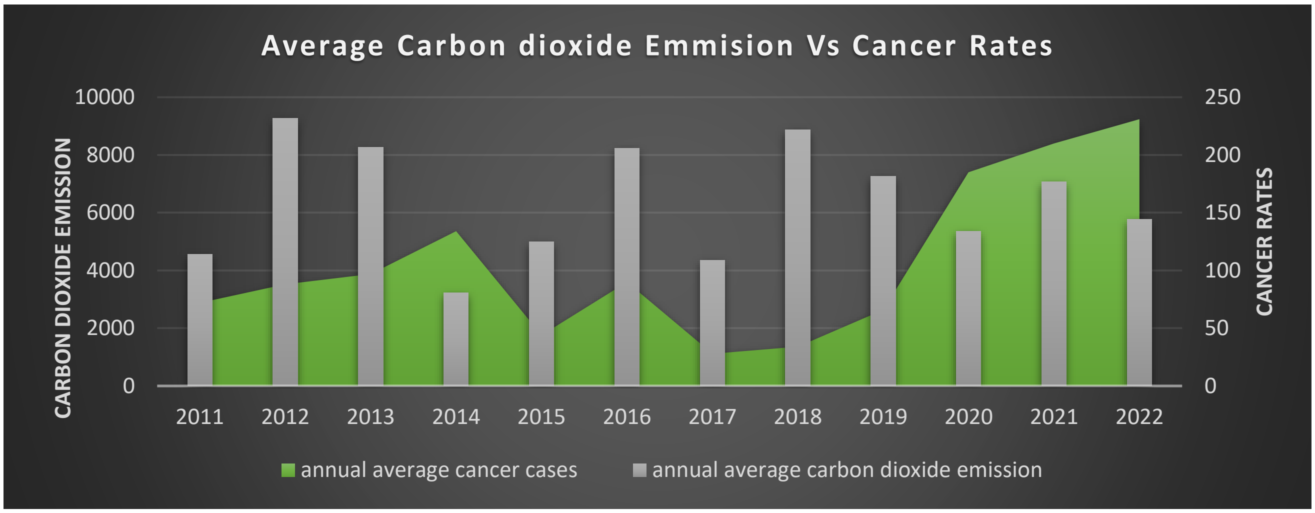

Figure 5: Average Carbon dioxide vs cancer rate

4.6 Findings and Implications

The analysis elucidates several climate-related factors contributing to the rising cancer incidence. Firstly, increased temperatures and elevated carbon dioxide emissions correlate strongly with higher cancer rates, possibly due to accelerated environmental degradation and heightened exposure to pollutants. Prolonged exposure to polluted air may compromise respiratory and immune systems, increasing cancer risk. Secondly, irregular precipitation, notably reduced rainfall, exacerbates drought conditions, concentrating pollutants in water sources. This lack of water dilutes contaminants less effectively, potentially leading to higher concentrations of carcinogens in drinking water and agricultural products. This scenario elevates the likelihood of human exposure to harmful compounds. Fluctuating maize production, influenced by climate variability, reflects the broader impacts of agricultural stress on food security and public health. Crop failures or droughts can result in food scarcity, and compelling reliance on lower-quality or contaminated resources, which may undermine nutritional intake and increase cancer risks.

4.7 Conclusion

The findings underscore the growing public health risks associated with climate change, particularly in drought-prone areas. Machine learning models, such as Random Forest, have illuminated the critical role of environmental factors ,including temperature, precipitation, and carbon dioxide emissions in driving cancer risk. These results highlight the urgent need for targeted prevention strategies, especially in climate-vulnerable regions, to mitigate the health impacts of climate change.

5: Discussion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, will unravel the intricate findings from the previous data analysis, expanding upon their far-reaching implications. It examines the deeply interwoven relationship between climate change, environmental stressors, and public health focusing particularly on the alarming rise in cancer cases. From this, a set of recommendations are derived aimed at shaping policy, fostering public health initiatives, and driving further research to confront the growing dangers posed by climate-triggered droughts and the accompanying environmental decay.

5.2 Interpretation of Findings

The data from Chapter 4 offers striking revelations about the escalating cancer risk in Kitwe and its surrounding areas, rooted in part in the impacts of climate change. These findings, though specific to Zambia, echo broader global patterns in environmental health and climate change mitigation strategies.

5.2.1 Climate Change: A Catalyst for Public Health Crises

What emerges is a stark correlation: as temperatures soar, so too does the incidence of cancer in Kitwe, nestled in Zambia's drought-stricken Copperbelt. This region, reflective of Southern Africa's broader climate narrative, has suffered from rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and intensified CO_2 emissions. But how do these shifts amplify cancer risks? The pathways are many and varied. Pollutants among them carcinogens become concentrated in water and soil, as higher temperatures and irregular rainfall exacerbate their accumulation. Food insecurity, worsened during drought years, pushes communities toward consuming either contaminated or nutritionally inadequate food, which may further exacerbate cancer risks. The elevated CO_2 levels compound the issue by driving up air pollution, directly linking to cancers like lung cancer. Moreover, drought and rising emissions erode water quality, heightening carcinogenic exposure through polluted drinking water and agricultural runoff.

5.2.2 Drought, Agriculture, and Health: A Volatile Triad

Take maize, a critical staple in Zambia, its production fluctuated significantly over the study period, correlating with variations in both rainfall and temperature. When maize yields plummeted, cancer cases surged. This suggests a troubling link between food insecurity, driven by drought, and public health challenges. With less diverse and potentially more contaminated food sources to rely on, communities may face increased exposure to harmful substances. As agriculture, a cornerstone of Zambia's economy, falters under the weight of climate-induced droughts, the strain on public health systems intensifies. Food scarcity, malnutrition, and water contamination all amplify the risks of non-communicable diseases like cancer.

5.3 Policy Implications

The study draws an undeniable connection between climate change and health outcomes, demanding immediate policy action. A robust, comprehensive policy response is essential to curb the adverse effects of environmental degradation on public health, especially in vulnerable regions like Zambia.

5.3.1 Strengthening Environmental Regulations

Strengthening environmental regulations emerges as a priority. To cut down carbon emissions and safeguard water sources, stringent emission controls must be enforced particularly in pollution-heavy areas like Kitwe, where mining and industrial activities reign. Policymakers need to champion the transition to cleaner energy sources, clamp down on industrial emissions, and promote sustainable practices across industries. These steps will not just combat air pollution but will also mitigate long-term health risks linked to environmental carcinogens.

Furthermore, protecting water resources through reinforced policies is critical. Drought-prone regions are especially susceptible to health hazards from contaminated water sources. Investments in water purification infrastructure and improved sanitation are pivotal in reducing waterborne diseases and cancer risks. By securing access to clean water, public health outcomes can be dramatically improved in areas most vulnerable to environmental contamination.

5.3.2 Fostering Climate-Resilient Agricultural Practices

Policy frameworks must also prioritize climate-resilient agricultural practices. This involves funding research and development of drought-tolerant crops, which can buffer communities from the harshest effects of erratic rainfall. Promoting sustainable farming methods, such as crop rotation, agroforestry, and conservation agriculture, can empower smallholder farmers. These techniques not only bolster food security but also enhance soil health, conserve resources, and reduce the indirect health impacts that stem from food scarcity such as malnutrition and heightened vulnerability to diseases.

5.4 Public Health Recommendations

The clear linkage between climate-driven droughts and cancer risks calls for targeted public health interventions to counter these escalating challenges.

5.4.1 Expanding Cancer Screening and Early Detection

With cancer cases mounting, the need for widespread cancer screening and early detection cannot be overstated, particularly in drought-affected areas. Early detection is pivotal in improving survival rates and reducing the strain on health systems. A multi-pronged approach is required: raise public awareness, educate communities on the importance of regular screenings, and make diagnostic services more accessible, particularly in underserved rural areas. Mobile screening units, in collaboration with local clinics, can extend the reach of these services. Strengthening healthcare infrastructure with the right tools and trained personnel is equally crucial. Adequate policies and funding will be necessary to sustain these initiatives, enabling earlier diagnoses and better health outcomes.

5.4.2 Heightened Public Health Education and Awareness

In regions prone to drought, educating the public about health risks tied to environmental changes is paramount. Public health campaigns must emphasize the importance of water safety which involves promoting the use of clean water for cooking and drinking while encouraging the adoption of household water purification methods. Simultaneously, fostering healthy dietary practices becomes essential; communities should be guided to avoid contaminated food sources and encouraged to consume nutritious, locally available alternatives, especially when staples like maize are scarce. This dual emphasis on clean water and a healthy diet can substantially mitigate the health risks associated with drought conditions.

5.4.3 Strengthening Healthcare Infrastructure

Tackling the rise in non-communicable diseases like cancer demands a fortified healthcare system. Investments in healthcare personnel, advanced diagnostic tools, and upgraded facilities are crucial. By forming partnerships with international health organizations, Zambia can secure vital funding and technical support to enhance cancer prevention and treatment. These efforts will enable the country to more effectively manage the increasing cancer burden and improve overall health outcomes.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has woven together the intricate threads connecting climate-induced droughts, environmental degradation, and the escalating public health crises in Zambia, with a focus on cancer risks. The findings make it clear: a comprehensive response involving policy reforms, public health initiatives, and further research is urgently needed to safeguard vulnerable communities. A coordinated effort among governments, international organizations, healthcare systems, and local communities is essential to building resilience against the dual threats of climate change and disease.

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