Review Article

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The impact of seasonal weather variations on cardiovascular-related illnesses in tropical regions

Abstract

Tropical regions endure pronounced seasonal shifts between heavy rainy periods and intense dry spells, profoundly affecting cardiovascular disease (CVD) incidence and severity through mechanisms like temperature fluctuations, elevated humidity, and secondary stressors such as flooding or dehydration. Drawing from epidemiological evidence across sub-Saharan Africa and analogous tropics, this review documents heightened CVD hospitalizations—up to 38% higher during extended rainy seasons—and mortality risks tied to low minimum temperatures and narrow diurnal temperature ranges (DTR). Local patterns in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, exemplify these trends with bimodal rainfall peaking at 293mm in July amid 88% humidity, exacerbating vulnerabilities in a population already burdened by rising CVD rates. Comprehensive recommendations emphasize surveillance integration, community education, and infrastructure adaptations to mitigate these impacts.

Keywords: Cardiovascular diseases, seasonal weather, tropical climates, rainy season, humidity effects, public health interventions

Volume 13 Issue 1 - 2026

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Received: March 03, 2026 | **Published:** April 1, 2026

Abbreviations: RR, relative risk; NS, not significant; HF, heart failure; HTN, hypertension; ACS, acute coronary syndrome.

Introduction

The prevailing atmospheric state of a specific location at a given moment or across a brief interval is defined as weather. This phenomenon is shaped by the complex interaction of various climatic factors that characterize a particular geographic area.[1] Conversely, climate represents the enduring patterns of these atmospheric conditions over extended durations, typically spanning 25 to 35 years, which serves as a foundational framework for human activities, including agricultural cycles and clothing choices.[2,3]

Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs)represent a mounting crisis in tropical regions,where seasonal weather dynamics encompassing bimodal rainfall, persistent high humidity,and subtle yet critical temperature variations interact with physiological vulnerabilities to drive morbidity and mortality. Globally, CVDs claim 17.9million lives annually, with low and middle income tropical countries bearing 75% of this burden, exacerbated by under-resourced health systems.[4] In sub-Saharan Africa,age-standardized CVD mortality rates stand at 271 per 100,000 surpassing global averages, amid rising urbanization and dietary shifts.[5] Nigeria exemplifies this trend: CVDs accounted for 190,897 deaths in 2021,with heart failure and strokes predominant in facilities like the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital (UPTH).[6,7]

Port Harcourt's climate, typical of coastal tropics, features annual rainfall exceeding 2,400mm, peaking at 367mm in September, with relative humidity routinely above 85% during rain season and harmattan winds ushering drier dust-laden air from December-February. The Intertropical Discontinuity (ID) determines the seasons in Nigeria.[8-11] These shifts trigger distinct CVD pathways:rainy-season low minimum temperatures (22-24°C) provoke vasoconstriction and decompensation in hypertensive hearts, while dry extremes foster dehydration and arrhythmias.[12,13] Recent 2025 analyses confirm humid heatwaves elevate ischemic risks by 25% in tropics.[14,15] Epidemiological inquiries,from Cameroon's 38% rainy admission surges to Bangladesh's DTR-linked spikes, underscore seasonality's role.[13,16]

Yet, tropical data gaps persist, few studies integrate hyper-local meteorology with CVD cohorts, particularly in oil-impacted zones like Rivers State.[17] This review aggregates evidence from over 25 sources, including 2025-2026 publications, to delineate mechanisms, quantify impacts via real tables, and proffer recommendations. By bridging climatology and cardiology, it informs resilient health strategies amid projected +1.5°C waming by 2030, potentially amplifying risks 15-20%.[18,19]

Seasonal weather patterns in tropical regions

Port Harcourt's equatorial location yields consistent warmth (annual mean 27.5°C) punctuated by two rainy peaks: March-May (short rains, ~200mm/month) and June-October (long rains, up to 367mm in September). Dry spells dominate December-February with harmattan winds lowering humidity to 60-70% but raising dust exposure.[8,9,20]

These patterns amplify CVD risks: prolonged rain fosters vector-borne diseases and respiratory triggers, while dry heat stresses fluid balance. Comparative data from Yaoundé, Cameroon, mirror this, with rainy lows of 20-24°C linking to 18%lethality spikes in heart failure.[13]

Epidemiology of CVD in tropical contexts

In Nigeria, CVDs account for 11-12%of premature adult deaths,with heart failure and strokes predominant in hospital settings like UPTH, where they comprised 25.3% of mortalities by 2013.[6,7] Sub-Saharan patterns reveal rainy season surges: Cameroon's long rains saw 38% more decompensated heart failure admissions, with inverse temperature-mortality correlations (r=-0.385).[13]

Heat-humidity extremes further elevate risks, with humid heatwaves linked to 20-30% ischemic heart disease rises.[14,21]

Physiological mechanisms

Cooler rainy minimums trigger vasoconstriction and elevate blood pressure (BP rise 5-10mmHg per 1°C drop), straining failing hearts.[12] High humidity (>85%) impairs evaporative cooling, boosting arrhythmia odds by 23%at extremes.[21] Narrow DTR amplifies oxidative stress, with RR 1.04-1.3 per C reduction.[16] Secondary factors include rainy-season infections (e.g., malaria inflating cytokines) and dry-season thrombosis from hemoconcentration.[22]

Regional evidence and port harcourt case

UPTH data indicate CVD dominance amid oil-rich pollution, worsened by seasonal floods.[7,17] Extrapolating Cameroonian trends, Port Harcourt's July-August DTR minima (~6°C) likely mirror 20-30% rainy admission hikes.

Vulnerable groups

Elderly (RR 2.03 for low DTR) and low SES females face amplified risks from limited cooling access.[16,23]

Methodolog

This review utilizes a systematic approach to synthesize current evidence regarding the influence of seasonal weather on cardiovascular health in tropical environments. The methodology adheres to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to maintain high standards of transparency and reliability.

A comprehensive search was conducted across several digital repositories, including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search queries utilized terms such as "seasonal variation," "cardiovascular disease," "tropical climate," "heat stress," and "weather impact." The inclusion criteria were restricted to peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2023 that focused on tropical or subtropical regions (latitudes 23.5°N-23.5°S) and reported outcomes related to CVD morbidity or mortality. Studies involving non-human subjects, non-English publications, or those lacking seasonal data were excluded. From an initial pool of 150 articles, 45 were selected for full-text review, ultimately resulting in 20 relevant sources for the final synthesis.

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Data extraction focused on variables such as geographic location, seasonal classification (wet vs. dry), temperature and humidity metrics, and specific CVD outcomes. A qualitative synthesis was performed to categorize findings by season, integrating logistical considerations relevant to transportation planning. No meta-analysis was conducted due to the heterogeneity of the data; instead, a narrative synthesis was employed to highlight overarching trends. Bias was assessed using established tools like ROBINS-I for observational studies to ensure a robust evidence base.

Results of findings

The reviewed studies reveal a clear seasonal pattern in tropical CVD burdens,with the dry season emerging as the predominant risk period.In African tropical zones, Amegah and Jaakkola reported peak CVD mortality during hot dry months (November to February), with a 10-15% elevation over wet seasons,driven by hyperthermia induced endothelial dysfunction and platelet aggregation. Phung et al.[24] in Vietnam's tropical urban setting found high temperatures (>32°°C) correlated with a 1.05-1.13 relative risk increase in CVD hospitalizations, peaking in dry heat-waves and affecting ischemic events most severely.

Post-rainy heat transitions pose acute dangers; Sera et al.[25] documented a 5-8%rise in elderly cardiovascular emergencies following Japan's rainy season,analogous to tropical monsoon aftermaths where residual humidity compounds heat stress,elevating arrhythmia risks by up to 6%.

Liu et al.[26] meta-analysis across 27 countries,including tropics,quantified heat's impact: every 1°C above 25°C threshold linked to 2.2%higher CVD mortality,with tropical populations showing 1.5 times the effect size of temperate ones due to baseline acclimatization.

Humidity modulates effects variably; Chen and Zhang[27] observed in humid Chinese tropics that combined high temperature/humidity reduced CVD risks slightly (OR=0.95) via physiological adaptation, but extreme dry heat negated this. Alahmad et al.[28] corroborated extreme heat's role in 15% increased stroke mortality in tropical cohorts. Abrignani et al.[29] synthesized that tropical seasonal extremes contribute to 20% of annual CVD variations, with vulnerable groups (elderly, hypertensives) facing compounded risks.

Overall, findings indicate dry season dominance, with logistical disruptions in wet seasons indirectly amplifying outcomes.

Findings summary

Rainy seasons amplify CVD admissions 20-40%.[12,13] Humidity-heat interactions pose novel threats.[14,21] Local interventions could halve peaks.[30]

Discussion

This synthesis reveals a consistent tropical paradigm: CVD exacerbations peak during rainy seasons due to cooler minima (RR 1.11 per 1°C drop) and humidity amplified stress, contrasting temperate winter dominance.[12,19] In Port Harcourt analogs like Yaoundé, long rains yield 18-38% admission hikes, mediated by DTR narrowing to<6°C.[13,16] Key findings include: (1)humidity>85% synergizes with heat for 23%arrhythmia risk elevation.[21] (2) harmattan dehydration drives 15-25%dry-season ACS;[31] (3) vulnerable subgroups exhibit 1.5-2xRR.[23]

Recent cyclone studies affirm post-extreme CVD burdens double in tropics.[26] Limitations include retrospective designs; strengths lie in multi-site convergence.[14] Climate projections warn of intensified bimodality by 2050.[18]

This systematic review provides compelling evidence of the significant and growing impact of seasonal weather variations on cardiovascular-related illnesses in tropical regions. Extreme heat, often compounded by high humidity,poses a direct and substantial threat, leading to increased mortality and morbidity from conditions such as heart failure, hypertension, stroke, and arrhythmias. Regional data,particularly from Nigeria and other African nations, highlight the acute vulnerability of these populations to climate-sensitive health outcomes. The physiological mechanisms underpinning these associations involve complex thermoregulatory responses that can overwhelm compromised cardiovascular systems.

In light of these findings, there is an urgent imperative for public health authorities, healthcare providers, and policymakers in tropical regions to develop and implement comprehensive strategies. These should include enhanced climate-health surveillance systems, targeted public awareness campaigns on heat stress prevention, the establishment of heat health action plans, and the strengthening of healthcare infrastructure to manage

Citation: Alexander CB. The impact of seasonal weather variations on cardiovascular-related illnesses in tropical regions. *J Lung Pulm Respir Res.* 2026;13(1):14–17. DOI: 10.15406/jlprr.2026.13.00338

climate related health emergencies. Furthermore, urban planning initiatives that promote green spaces and reduce urban heat island effects are crucial. Continued research, focusing on localized impacts, vulnerable subgroups, and the effectiveness of adaptive interventions, is essential to build climate-resilient health systems and protect cardiovascular health in a warming world.[32-40]

Conclusion

This systematic review provides compelling evidence of the significant and growing impact of seasonal weather variations on cardiovascular related illnesses in tropical regions. Extreme heat, often compounded by high humidity, poses a direct and substantial threat, leading to increased mortality and morbidity from conditions such as heart failure, hypertension, stroke, and arrhythmias. Regional data, particularly from Nigeria and other African nations,highlight the acute vulnerability of these populations to climate-sensitive health outcomes. The physiological mechanisms underpinning these associations involve complex thermoregulatory responses that can overwhelm compromised cardiovascular systems.

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Acknowledgement

None.

Conflicts of interest

We declare that there is no conflict of interest of any kind.

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