Climate change induced occupational stress and reported morbidity among cocoa farmers in South-Western Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Climate change is one of the major development hurdles in many African countries. Beside its direct impacts on agricultural productivity, it is a serious health challenge to the residents of affected areas. It is important to evaluate the health risk and occupational stressors associated with climate change. In rural areas, climate change presents some form of welfare shocks, for which the required institutional supports for coping are lacking. This undermines the need for strategic adaptation among African farmers [1]. Depending on the responsiveness of a farming enterprise to climate change, its impacts on farm households can be strategically enormous. This is often the case due to differences in risk variances associated with observed climatic scenarios. Also, the health outcome of farm households are related to climate change, which is related to several external and internal health-related issues, such as management of occupational stressors. This study seeks, inter alia, to determine the climate related occupational stress and factors influencing reported sick times among cocoa farmers.

Material and Method

Data were collected from selected cocoa farmers in South-Western Nigeria. Descriptive statistics and Negative Binomial regression were used for data analyses.

Results

The results showed that cocoa farmers were ageing, and that the majority had cultivating cocoa for most of their years of farming. Cocoa was the primary crop for the majority of the farmers, while 92.00% of the farmers in Osun state owned the cultivated cocoa farms. The forms of reported climate change induced occupational stresses were increase in pest infestation (74.5% in Ekiti state), difficulties in weed control (82.1% in Ekiti state), missing regular times scheduled for spraying cocoa pods (45.7% in Ondo state), inability to spray cocoa effectively (58.5% in Ondo state), and reduction in cocoa yield (71.7% in Ekiti state). The Negative Binomial regression results showed that the age of farmers (0.0103), their education (-0.0226), years of cocoa farming (-0.0112), malaria infection (0.4901), missed spraying (0.5061), re-spraying of cocoa (0.2630), reduction in cocoa yield (0.20154), contact with extension (0.2411) and residence in Ondo state (-0.2311) were statistically significant (p<0.05).

Conclusion

Climate change influences the farm operations of cocoa farmers with resultant occupational stresses. Efforts to assist cocoa farmers should include, among others, provision of weather forecasts and some form of insurance.

Key words
climate change, occupational stressors, morbidity, climate forecasts, Nigeria

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exposed forms of occupational health shocks. The requisite skill for adequately prescribed survival mechanisms is often downplayed by unexpected sicknesses, which are motivated by changing climatic parameters and associated stress.

**Objective.** This study seeks, *inter alia*, to determine the climate-related occupational stress and factors influencing reported sick times among cocoa farmers.

**MATERIALS AND METHOD**

**Data and sampling procedures.** Data collected from cocoa farmers in three randomly selected cocoa growing states of southwestern Nigeria were used. Respondents were selected using the multi-stage sampling method. Three states – Ondo, Osun and Ekiti – were selected randomly at the first stage. The second stage involved selection of some cocoa growing Local Government Areas (LGAs). At the third stage, cocoa growing villages were randomly selected, while farm households were selected for interview from the selected villages. The questionnaire was pre-tested before being administered to farmers. As the highest cocoa growing area in south-western Nigeria, a total of 282 questionnaires were administered in Ondo state. In Ekiti and Osun states, 106 and 125 questionnaires were administered, respectively.

**Model specification.** The number of times that farmers were sick during the cocoa season was reported. Modelling the factors influencing this requires the use of Poisson regression. The model was specified by assuming a random variable $Y$ which has Poisson distribution with parameter if it has integer values $y = 0, 1, 2, 3, 4,k$. The probability distribution can be specified as:

$$\Pr(Y = y) = \frac{e^{-\mu} \mu^y}{y!} \text{ for } \mu > 0.$$ 

The model takes the form of:

$$lnY_i = \alpha + \beta_j \sum_{j=1}^{k} s_k$$

where $\alpha$ and $\beta$ are estimated parameters. Also, $s$ represents the explanatory variables. The continuous variables are: age of household head, years of schooling, number of cocoa farms, household size, years of cocoa farming (years), proportion of farm covered by cocoa trees (%), market distance (km), land area (acres) and farm distance (km). The others were specified as dummy variables (yes = 1, 0 otherwise) and were: malaria infection reported, male household headship, cocoa as primary crop, farming as primary occupation, own cocoa farms, missed regular spraying of cocoa, increase in pest infection, difficulties in weed control, increase in malaria infection, scarcity of drinking water, scarcity of cooking water, reduction in cocoa yields, higher incidence of black pod disease, wild fires, inability to spray cocoa effectively, inability to dry cocoa effectively, own radio, own television, own bicycle, own motorcycle, own vehicle, contacts with extension agent, Ondo farmers, re-spraying cocoa.

Poisson regression maximizes Likelihood Estimation (MLE) due to violation of homoscedasticity assumption. The goodness of fit was evaluated from statistical significance of deviance statistics. Assumption of Poisson distribution was rejected from its statistical significance ($p<0.05$). Therefore, Negative Binomial regression was tried and its superiority over Poisson regression was evaluated from likelihood ratio test statistics of alpha equal to zero.

**RESULTS**

Table 1 shows the distribution of farmers’ socio-economic characteristics across the states. It reveals that the average age of farmers was the highest in Ekiti state (58.91 years), while the average years of schooling was highest in Osun state (6.98). Average household size and dependency ratio (number of children under 14 divided by number of adults less 65 years) were highest in Osun state with 7.60 and 0.79, respectively. Average years of farming experience and years of cultivating cocoa were highest in Ekiti state with 46.06 and 45.00, respectively. Average cocoa land area and number of cocoa farms were highest in Osun state. The majority of farmers across the states indicated that cocoa was the primary crop. Although 92.00% of farmers in Osun state owned the cultivated cocoa farms, 80% of the farmers had farming as the primary occupation. Also, the average distance of the village to cocoa farms was highest in Ondo state – 10.19 km. The average number of times that the household head fell sick during the cocoa season was highest in Osun state – 2.66. More than half of the households indicated that climate change affects their health – 63.5% in Ondo state. Similarly, in Ekiti state, 73.6% noted that other household members were also sick during the cocoa season. Table 2 shows the form of occupational stress that resulted from climate change.

<table>
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<th>Table 1. Socio-economic status of cocoa farmers in the selected states</th>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>Age of household head</td>
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<td>Years of schooling</td>
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<td>Household size</td>
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<td>Dependency ratio</td>
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<td>Years of cocoa farming</td>
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<td>Number of cocoa farms</td>
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<td>Own the cocoa farm</td>
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<td>Cocoa land areas</td>
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Increase in pest infestation was reported by the majority of farmers across the states, with 74.5% in Ekiti state. Difficulties in weed control due to climate change were reported by the majority of the farmers. Some cocoa farmers reported missing regular times scheduled for spraying cocoa pods, as a result of which, 45.7% reported this in Ondo state. Also, inability to spray cocoa effectively was reported by 58.5% of the farmers in Ondo state. Either due to ageing or some other issues related to extended droughts, some of the farmers reported that their cocoa trees were dying. The highest proportion of the farmers that reported this was 58.9% in Ondo state. Similarly, due to too much rainfall, some farmers reported that cocoa trees were falling over. This was reported by 76.4% of farmers in Ekiti state. Reduction in cocoa yield was reported by the majority of the farmers, with highest percentage (71.7%) in Ekiti state. Similarly, in Osun state, 56.8% of farmers reported reduction in cocoa yield. Higher incidence of black pod disease was reported by the majority of the farmers, with Ekiti state having the highest percentage – 67.0%.

Table 3 shows the results of Negative Binomial regression model. The model produced a better result than Poisson regression since the likelihood ratio test of alpha equal to zero was statistically significant (p<0.0001). The likelihood ratio chi square value was statistically significant (p<0.0001) showing that the estimated parameters were not jointly equal to zero. Similarly, the results showed that those households that reported malaria infection had a log of sick time significantly higher by 0.4901 (p<0.01). If farmer’s age increased by one unit, the log of sick time significantly increased by 0.0103 (p<0.05). However, if the years of schooling increased by one unit, the log of sick time significantly increased by 0.0206 (p<0.05). Furthermore, if household size increased by one unit, the log of sick time was significantly reduced by 0.0112 (p<0.01). The farmers who grew cocoa as the primary crop had a log of sick time significantly reduced by 0.2605 (p<0.10).

The farmers who missed regular spraying of cocoa had a log of sick time that was significantly higher by 0.5061, when compared with those who did not miss spraying. Of the variable occupational stress induced by climate change, only scarcity of drinking water and reduction in cocoa yields showed statistical significance at p<0.10 and p<0.05, respectively. Farmers who reported scarcity of drinking water and reduction in cocoa yields had their log of sick time significantly lower than those who did not.
time significantly higher by 0.4537 and 0.2015, respectively, compared with those who did not report this. The farmers who had to re-spray their cocoa pods had a log of sick time significantly higher by 0.2630, compared with those who did not (p<0.01).

It should be noted that although statistically insignificant (p=0.10), the parameters of the majority of the other variables that encompassed occupational stress induced by climate change, were positively noted and of high magnitude. Furthermore, the results showed that the farmers with access to television had a log sick time significantly higher by 0.2626 (p<0.05), while those with contacts with extension agents had a log of sick time that was significantly higher by 0.2411. Also, farmers from Ondo state had a log of sick time significantly lower by 0.2311.

**DISCUSSION**

Cocoa farming households were ageing, which confirms previous findings [6], and reflects the fact that without rehabilitation, cocoa trees were also ageing. Low level of educational attainment is often associated with residence in most of Nigerian rural areas [7]. In some instances, illiterate individuals decide to go into full time farming due to lack of skills to work in the labour markets [8, 9]. Similarly, low educational attainment results in low agricultural productivity in Nigeria [10, 11]. Average family size was high in all the states, which reflects the fact that some farmers demand more children to ensure availability of family labour for several farm operations. Even when ownership of a farm had been claimed, in some instances, cocoa farms were inherited. This can explain low cocoa pod yields since most of those trees were planted many years ago [6]. It can also be linked to the size of the farm and number of cocoa farms. The distance of cocoa farm would traditionally reflect the formation processes of cocoa villages based on ownership of the distributed forestlands [12].

Sicknecess during the cocoa season were reported by many farmers. Climate change was also linked to poor health. Malaria, which was indicated as the major health challenge, is among the diseases that climate change promotes due to favourable breeding grounds for mosquitoes which are the major transmission media for the vector parasites [13]. Scarcities of drinking and cooking water were also reported. These could promote incidences of water-borne diseases like cholera which was mostly reported in Ekiti state. The nature of precipitation was found to have association with reported cases of cholera in North-West Nigeria [14].

Table 3 shows that reported malaria as a major health problem had a higher log of sick time. This is expected because malaria is a major health problem in Nigeria [21, 22]. In rural areas, poor housing conditions and the busy environment constitute serious constraint on addressing malaria supression. In line with expectation, it was found that the age of farmers increased the log of sick time. As people grow older, the likelihood of falling sick increases [23, 24]. Furthermore, the results show that education reduces the log of sick time. This is expected, because education can induce awareness about practices to promote hygienic practices, behavior change and access to income for demanding better health care services [25].

Missing regular cocoa spraying increased the log of sick time among cocoa farmers. This may have resulted from associated stress resulting from missing regular spraying. Similarly, in the absence of a sufficient family work force, aged cocoa farmers who are likely to fall sick often would have to miss regular cocoa spraying since they are unable to stand tediousness of the farm operation, and makes them rely on hired labours. Similarly, farmers who noted that climate change reduced cocoa yield had a higher log of sick time. As cocoa yield decreased, farm incomes also decreased, thereby subjecting the farmers to serious financial stress. Additionally, the scarcity of drinking water due to climate change increased the log of sick time among farmers.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Climate change has been linked to a rise in some health challenges in some tropical countries. The peculiarity of cocoa agriculture prescribes strong links between climate change, its associated occupational stress, and the health status of farmers. The presented study establishes that cocoa farmers in Nigeria are currently suffering from production constraints associated with climate change. The results, *inter alia*, show a high association between reported sick times and some climate induced occupational stressors that included reported malaria, re-spraying of cocoa pods, inability to spray cocoa effectively, and decline in cocoa yields. The findings suggest a very strong need for promoting assistance in the form of climate forecasts, insurance and input support systems for farmers in order to ensure adaptation to climate change. The findings also underscore the need to promote education and incentives to youths to be involved in farming. This is critical because ageing is a major factor promoting sickness among cocoa farmers.
REFERENCES


