



# Age-dependent Radiological Risk Assessment of Radon ( $^{222}\text{Rn}$ ) in Samples of Commercial Bottled Water from Benin City, Nigeria

Felix A. Popoola <sup>a\*</sup>, Osahon O. David <sup>b</sup>, Sheu I. Owoyemi <sup>c</sup>,  
Modupe E. Sanyaolu <sup>d</sup>, Isaac O. Elijah <sup>e</sup> and Iko A. Simon <sup>f</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Mathematical and Physical Sciences, Glorious Vision University, P.M.B. 001, Ogwa, Edo State, Nigeria.

<sup>b</sup> Department of Physics, University of Benin, P.M.B. 1154, Ugbowo, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

<sup>c</sup> Department of Integrated Science, Adeyemi Federal University of Education, P.M.B. 520, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria.

<sup>d</sup> Department of Physical Sciences, Redeemer's University, P.M.B. 230, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria.

<sup>e</sup> Department of Works and Physical Planning, Glorious Vision University, P. M. B. 001, Ogwa, Edo State, Nigeria.

<sup>f</sup> Department of Physics with Electronics, Karl Kumm University, Vom, Plateau State, Nigeria.

## Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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## ABSTRACT

Radon inhalation as well as ingestion through the use of water has a high potential of causing serious harm to sensitive cells and organs of the body when absorbed into the bloodstream. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the radiological health damage caused by radon in drinking

\*Corresponding author: E-mail: felixgoke@gmail.com, fpopoola@sau.edu.ng;

bottled water available in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. Radon concentration was measured using a RAD7 electronic radon detector. The mean activity concentration radon is  $137.18 \pm 0.25$  mBq/L. This mean value is slightly higher than 0.1 Bq/L recommended by the Standard Organisation of Nigeria but lower than the maximum contaminant level (MCL) of 11.1 Bq/L set by the United States Environmental Protection Agency and 100 Bq/L set by the World Health Organisation (WHO) for consumption of radon in drinking water. The mean total annual effective dose is  $1.07 \pm 1.91$  ( $\mu\text{Sv/y}$ ) for infants,  $0.61 \pm 1.09$  ( $\mu\text{Sv/y}$ ) for children, and  $0.70 \pm 1.24$  ( $\mu\text{Sv/y}$ ) for adults. The computed annual effective dose to the public by inhalation and ingestion radon through the use of bottled water in the study areas are lower than the 0.1 mSv/y limit recommended by WHO. The estimated average for the age group excess lifetime cancer risk are  $3.21 \pm 5.71$ ,  $1.836 \pm 3.26$ ,  $2.086 \pm 3.71$  ( $\times 10^{-6}$ ) for infants, children and adults respectively. These values are below the world average permissible levels. Hence, consumption of the water examined poses no serious health risk to consumers.

*Keywords: Bottled water; radon ( $^{222}\text{Rn}$ ); Benin City; cancer risk; effective dose; RAD7 detector.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Water is incredibly an important aspect of lives [1]. Water makes up about 60% of body weight in men and 55% in women and for infants it is about 70%–80% [1]. Unrefined water includes a range of pollutants, including biological, chemical, and radioactive contaminants [2]. Most people depend profoundly on groundwater sources as a result of population growth, the contamination of streams, and the inadequacy of the government's potable water supply, numerous individuals have resorted to consuming treated water, such as bottled water and sachet water. In Nigeria, sachet water and bottled water have become increasingly embraced as a substitute for the inadequate safe drinking water from the government's pipe-borne water system. Bottled drinking water is water derived from any source of potable water (well, bore well, groundwater) which may be subjected to different treatment processes such as decantation, filtration, aeration, reverse osmosis, ozonation, ultraviolet treatment, silver ionization, other similar methods [1].

Radon is acknowledged as a cancer-causing substance. It is the most dangerous radioisotope to human health of all the radioactive elements that contribute to natural background radiation [3]. The most abundant form of radon is Rn-222, with a half-life of 3.82 days. Rn-222 is a decay product of radium (Ra-226), and a member of the U-238 decay chain (the most common isotope of uranium). It occurs in most rocks, soil, water body, plants, and animals [4].

The quality of drinking water is carefully monitored. One of the aspects of control is a control of the content of radioactive elements in water, especially radon. Ingestion of radon in

water is thought to pose a direct health risk through irradiation of sensitive cells in the gastrointestinal tract and in other organs once it is absorbed into the bloodstream. Thus, radon in drinking water could potentially produce adverse health effects in addition to lung cancer [3]. Once radon has entered the blood, through either the stomach or the small intestine, it is distributed among the organs according to the blood flow to them and the relative solubility of radon in the organs and in blood. Radon dissolved in blood that enters the lung will equilibrate with air in the gas-exchange region and be removed from the body [3].

Radon levels and radiological safety of bottled and sachet water have been investigated by several researchers in Nigeria and other countries of the world. The sachet water consumed in Damaturu, Yobe State, Nigeria, as reported by [5], has some level of radiological implications due to radon contamination. [6] measured the radon concentrations of 15 different brands of commercial bottled drinking water produced in China and assessed the impacts on human health from commercial bottled water. The relationship between different mineral content and radon concentration in drinking mineral-water was also explored. Despite bottled mineral water not posing a significant health risk to the public, study results showed radon levels were strongly correlated with its total dissolved solids and calcium concentration. Recently, with the RAD7 Radon monitoring system, [7] measured radon levels in commercial bottled water and deep well water samples, finding results that were significantly lower than USEPA and WHO recommendations. [2] determined the radon concentrations present in seventeen brands of sachet and bottled water packaged in Ile-Ife, South West Nigeria. [8]

assessed the radon concentrations from samples of bottled water available in the Iraqi markets. A study conducted by [9] measured the levels of activity in radon-222 in water samples collected from different sachet water companies in Dutsin-Ma local government area of Katsina State, Nigeria. According to the authors, water consumption does not pose significant health risks from a radiological standpoint. In spite of this, radiation levels in the drinking water need to be continuously monitored.

Thorough assessments and monitoring of drinking water quality, as well as concentrations of radon activity, are paramount to public health and safety. However, no study of this sort has been carried out in Edo State. Benin City which is the commercial hub of Edo State was chosen for this study. The study, therefore, aimed to determine the activity concentrations of radon ( $^{222}\text{Rn}$ ) in bottled water in Benin City, Nigeria, and assess the health hazards associated with ingestion and inhalation of radon.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Study Area

Benin City is the capital of Edo State, Nigeria and is located in the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The city has an area of 1, 204 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of approximately 1.84 million people [10]. The area is bounded by longitudes 4°36'–4°39' E and latitudes 8°27' – 8°30' N and area of about 500 square kilometres. Benin City is located within a tropical equatorial zone where there are two distinct seasons, one wet season from April to October and one dry season from November to March [11].

### 2.2 Sampling and Preparation

Ten brands of bottled water produced and sold or vended in Benin City were examined. Three bottles (75 cl each) of each of the brands were purchased from diverse stores, markets, and street hawkers in Benin city. Each brand of the purchased waters was transferred into a 1.5 L plastic bottle, previously rinsed and washed with distilled water. In the process of putting the water into the collection bottles, water bubbling was carefully prevented to stop dissolved radon from escaping. The experimental procedures used in this investigation were those published by [12]. The prepared samples were sealed and taken to the Ladoke Akintola University's Radiation and

Health Physics Laboratory, Department of Physics, for radon analysis.

### 2.3 Radon Measurement Using RAD7

RAD7 (Fig. 1) is a radon detector that is well-calibrated, quick, and accurate. The electronic detector employs the alpha spectrometry method with a bubbling kit. Alpha spectrometry method using RAD7 has widely been used by [5,7,8,2,12]. It can precisely assess the radon levels in a water sample in 20 minutes. The time required is quite short when compared to the radon half-life of 3.8 days, and as a result, the RAD7 detector is a good choice for measuring radon in water [13,14].



**Fig. 1. Setup of RAD-7 for radon measurement in water [13]**

Having obtained the values for the radon concentrations in the bottled water, a calculation of the yearly effective dosage of radon from ingestion ( $\mu\text{Sv}/\text{y}$ ) based on equation (1) was made [15,16,6,8,17]

$$AED_{Ing} = C_{RnW} \times C_f \times A_{WI} \quad (1)$$

Where,

$C_{RnW}$  is the activity concentration of  $^{222}\text{Rn}$  in (Bq/L),  $A_{IW}$  is the yearly consumption of drinking water (L/y),  $C_f$  is the age-dependent ingested dose conversion factor for  $^{222}\text{Rn}$ .

As per [15], the mean effective doses of radon due to inhalation ( $AED_{inh}$ ) in drinking water samples were calculated [6,18]:

$$AED_{Inh} (\mu\text{Sv}/\text{y}) = C_{RnW} \times R_{a,W} \times F \times O \times D_{CF} \quad (2)$$

where

$AED_{Inh}$  is the effective dose for inhalation,  $C_{RnW}$  is the radon concentration in water,  $R_{a,W}$  is the

ratio of radon in air to radon in tap water ( $1 \times 10^{-4}$ ),  $F$  is the equilibrium factor between radon and its decay products (0.4),  $O$  is the average indoor occupancy time per person (7000 h/y) and  $D_{CF}$  is the Dose Conversion Factor for radon exposure. Infants, children, and adults consume approximately 260, 350, and 730 litres of water per year, respectively [18,19] and the ingested dose conversion factor per age group are  $2.3 \times 10^{-8}$ ,  $5.9 \times 10^{-9}$ , and  $3.5 \times 10^{-9}$  (Sv/Bq) respectively [15,6,8,17].

The total Annual Effective Dose ( $\mu Sv/y$ ) as a result of ingestion and inhalation of radon through the use of the bottled water in the study area was obtained using equation (3)

$$AED_{Tot} = AED_{Ing} + AED_{Inh} \quad (3)$$

The lifetime cancer risk associated with radon concentrations in drinking water was calculated using equation (4) [8,20].

$$ELCR = \frac{\text{Annual effective dose} \times \text{Average lifespan} \times \text{Risk coefficient}}{\text{Average lifespan} \times \text{Risk coefficient}} \quad (4)$$

where, the nominal risk coefficient for the whole population is based on the International Commission on Radiological Protection public [21]. In Nigeria, the average life expectancy at birth is 54.5 years, according to the [22] report.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Radon Concentration

The radon activity concentrations, as presented in Table 1, are from a minimum value of  $20.83 \pm 0.18$  mBq/L in BTW 2 to a maximum of  $340.28 \pm 0.33$  mBq/L in BTW 1 with a mean of  $137.18 \pm 0.25$  mBq/L. The radon concentration value of BTW 8 is slightly closer to the maximum concentration recorded. There is a slight increase in the mean radon activity concentrations in this study over the 0.1 Bq/L recommended by the Standard Organisation of Nigeria [23] for human consumption of  $^{222}\text{Rn}$  concentrations in drinking water, but it is significantly below the maximum contaminant level (MCL) of 11.1 Bq/L recommended by the USEPA [24] and 100 Bq/L suggested by the WHO [25].

**Table 1. Radon concentrations (mBq/L) in bottled water in Benin City**

Sample ID	Radon Concentrations (mBq/L)
BTW 1	$340.28 \pm 0.33$
BTW 2	$20.83 \pm 0.18$
BTW 3	$21.10 \pm 0.19$
BTW 4	$20.83 \pm 0.19$
BTW 5	$20.94 \pm 0.19$
BTW 6	$41.65 \pm 0.20$
BTW 7	$41.65 \pm 0.20$
BTW 8	$337.52 \pm 0.34$
BTW 9	$232.01 \pm 0.30$
BTW 10	$294.95 \pm 0.32$
Minimum	$20.83 \pm 0.18$
Maximum	$340.28 \pm 0.33$
MEAN	$137.18 \pm 0.25$

**Table 2. Comparison of range/mean of radon activity concentrations in other part of the world with this study**

Location	Water type	$^{222}\text{Rn}$ Conc. (mBq/L)	References
Turkey	Bottled water	30.6–57.6 /43.1	[26]
Dhaka/Bangladesh	Bottle water	105–1300/590	[7]
Urumqi/China	Bottled water	13.3–300/21.6	[6]
Ile-Ife	Bottled water	0–9449.3/2442.8	[2]
Iraq	Bottle water	28.4–283/104.14	[8]
Damaturu/Yobe	Sachet water	4420–20210	[5]
Dutsin-Ma/Katsina	Sachet water	11690–13040/12037	[9]
Benin City	Bottled water	20.83–340.28/137.18	This study

The mean radon concentrations obtained in this study are slightly higher than those obtained by [6] in China, [26] in Turkey, [8] in Iraq and [9] in Katsina, Nigeria, as shown in Table 2. [12,7,2] reported radon mean concentrations greater than the obtained value in this study. The explanation for this low amount of radon in bottled water can be linked to the processing method employed by the bottled water factories, because radon gas is easily emitted when groundwater is agitated. In addition, the geological formation, soil porosity, meteorological parameters of the study area can also be a contributory factor [18].

### 3.2 Annual Mean Effective Dose of Radon

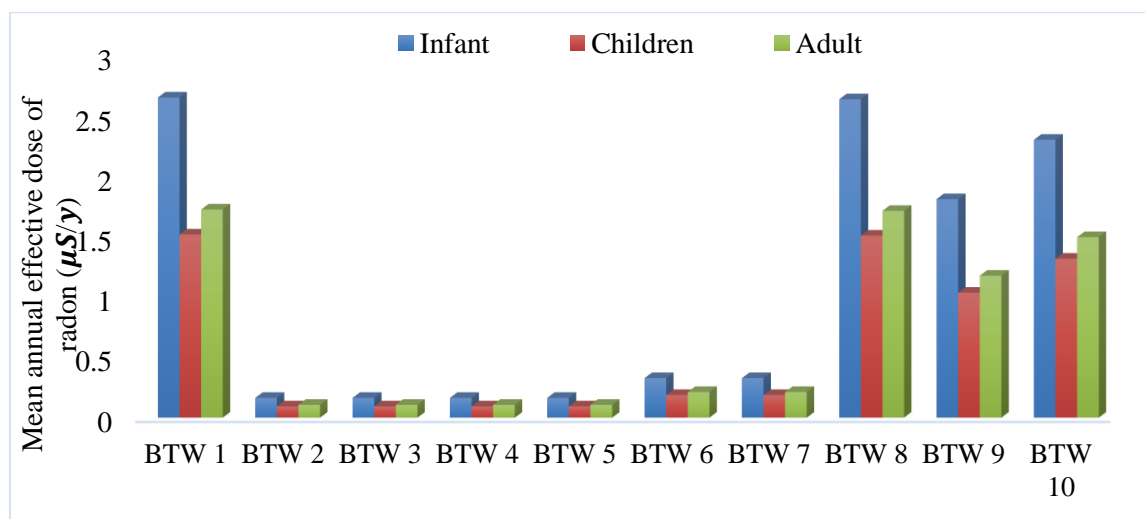
The results of the analysis of bottled water sold in Benin City indicate that the AED have minimum, maximum and mean values of 0.11 ± 0.95, 1.80 ± 1.80 and 0.73 ± 1.29 (µSv/y) for

infants; 0.04 ± 0.35, 0.66 ± 0.66 and 0.27 ± 0.48 (µSv/y) for children; 0.05 ± 0.46, 0.87 ± 0.87 and 0.35 ± 0.62 (µSv/y) for adults respectively. The inhalation for all ages has minimum, maximum and mean values of 0.05 ± 0.45, 0.86 ± 0.86 and 0.35 ± 0.61 (µSv/y). These findings are summarized in Table 3 and depicted in Fig. 2. The mean total AED are 1.07 ± 1.91, 0.61 ± 1.09 and 0.70 ± 1.24 (µSv/y) for infants, children and adults respectively. The infants recorded the highest value contributing 45% of the mean total AED, whereas the children and adults contributed 29% and 26% respectively. All the sampled bottled waters are below 0.1 mSv/y [27].

The infants age category recorded the highest radiation dose contributing 45% of the mean total AED. This implies that infants are the most susceptible to radiation exposure from radon intake. The probable cause can be connected to

**Table 3. Annual effective dose of radon (µSv/y) in bottled water in Benin City**

Sample ID	Ingestion (µSv/y)			Inhalation (µSv/y)	Total AED (µSv/y)		
	Infant	Children	Adults		Infant	Children	Adults
BTW 1	1.80 ± 1.75	0.66 ± 0.64	0.87 ± 0.84	0.86 ± 0.83	2.66 ± 2.58	1.52 ± 1.47	1.73 ± 1.67
BTW 2	0.11 ± 0.95	0.04 ± 0.35	0.05 ± 0.46	0.05 ± 0.45	0.16 ± 1.41	0.09 ± 0.80	0.11 ± 0.91
BTW 3	0.11 ± 1.01	0.04 ± 0.37	0.05 ± 0.49	0.05 ± 0.48	0.16 ± 1.48	0.09 ± 0.85	0.11 ± 0.96
BTW 4	0.11 ± 1.01	0.04 ± 0.37	0.05 ± 0.49	0.05 ± 0.48	0.16 ± 1.48	0.09 ± 0.85	0.11 ± 0.96
BTW 5	0.11 ± 1.01	0.04 ± 0.37	0.05 ± 0.49	0.05 ± 0.48	0.16 ± 1.48	0.09 ± 0.85	0.11 ± 0.96
BTW 6	0.22 ± 1.06	0.08 ± 0.39	0.11 ± 0.51	0.11 ± 0.50	0.33 ± 1.56	0.19 ± 0.89	0.21 ± 1.02
BTW 7	0.22 ± 1.06	0.08 ± 0.39	0.11 ± 0.51	0.11 ± 0.50	0.33 ± 1.56	0.19 ± 0.89	0.21 ± 1.02
BTW 8	1.79 ± 1.80	0.66 ± 0.66	0.86 ± 0.87	0.85 ± 0.86	2.64 ± 2.66	1.51 ± 1.52	1.72 ± 1.73
BTW 9	1.23 ± 1.59	0.45 ± 0.58	0.59 ± 0.77	0.59 ± 0.76	1.81 ± 2.34	1.04 ± 1.34	1.18 ± 1.52
BTW 10	1.56 ± 1.69	0.57 ± 0.62	0.75 ± 0.82	0.74 ± 0.81	2.30 ± 2.50	1.32 ± 1.43	1.50 ± 1.62
Minimum	0.11 ± 0.95	0.04 ± 0.35	0.05 ± 0.46	0.05 ± 0.45	0.16 ± 1.41	0.09 ± 0.80	0.11 ± 0.91
Maximum	1.80 ± 1.80	0.66 ± 0.66	0.87 ± 0.87	0.86 ± 0.86	2.66 ± 2.66	1.52 ± 1.52	1.73 ± 1.73
MEAN	0.73 ± 1.29	0.27 ± 0.48	0.35 ± 0.62	0.35 ± 0.61	1.07 ± 1.91	0.61 ± 1.09	0.70 ± 1.24



**Fig. 2. Total annual effective dose of radon (µSv/y) of bottled water in Benin City, Edo State**

**Table 4. Excess Lifetime Cancer Risk from consumption of bottled water in Benin City, Edo State**

Sample ID	ELCR ( $\times 10^{-3}$ )		
	Infant	Children	Adults
BTW 1	7.913 $\pm$ 7.73	4.526 $\pm$ 4.41	5.141 $\pm$ 5.01
BTW 2	0.492 $\pm$ 4.23	0.282 $\pm$ 2.40	0.321 $\pm$ 2.73
BTW 3	0.492 $\pm$ 4.44	0.282 $\pm$ 2.55	0.321 $\pm$ 2.88
BTW 4	0.492 $\pm$ 4.44	0.282 $\pm$ 2.55	0.321 $\pm$ 2.88
BTW 5	0.492 $\pm$ 4.44	0.282 $\pm$ 2.55	0.321 $\pm$ 2.88
BTW 6	0.983 $\pm$ 4.68	0.564 $\pm$ 2.67	0.638 $\pm$ 3.06
BTW 7	0.983 $\pm$ 4.68	0.564 $\pm$ 2.67	0.638 $\pm$ 3.06
BTW 8	7.913 $\pm$ 7.97	4.526 $\pm$ 4.56	5.141 $\pm$ 5.19
BTW 9	5.431 $\pm$ 7.01	3.105 $\pm$ 4.02	3.528 $\pm$ 4.56
BTW 10	6.906 $\pm$ 7.49	3.951 $\pm$ 4.29	4.487 $\pm$ 4.86
Minimum	0.492 $\pm$ 4.23	0.282 $\pm$ 2.40	0.321 $\pm$ 2.73
Maximum	7.913 $\pm$ 7.97	4.526 $\pm$ 4.56	5.141 $\pm$ 5.19
MEAN	3.21 $\pm$ 5.71	1.836 $\pm$ 3.26	2.086 $\pm$ 3.71

the high quantity of radon that they absorb per kilogram of body mass as a result of low organ mass and rapidly dividing cells [17], despite the lower volume of water intake compared to children and adults. Adults are the second most vulnerable group to radon exposure, probably due to increased water use. However, there is just a little variation between adult and children category dosages, which is consistent with [17]. The computed annual effective dose to the general population by inhalation and ingestion in the study areas are less than the 0.1 mSv/y level recommended by [27] and 1 mSv/y [28]. Comparatively, this study's annual effective dose (Sv/y) of radon is consistent with the findings of [26,6] and lower than 0.023-0.148 mSv for adults and 0.046-0.295 mSv for children reported by [5] and 25.56  $\pm$  2.69, 19.48  $\pm$  2.05 and 42.56  $\pm$  5.58 Sv/y for adults, children, and infants respectively reported by [12].

### 3.3 Evaluation of Excess Lifetime Cancer Risk

The results of the excess lifetime cancer risk presented in Table 4 indicate that the mean value is 3.21  $\pm$  5.71, 1.836  $\pm$  3.26, 2.086  $\pm$  3.71 ( $\times 10^{-6}$ ) for infants, children and adults respectively. The infants recorded higher value than adults and children. Internal radon exposure is extremely dangerous and can result in respiratory disorders such as asthma [29]. However, the result obtained in the study, for all age categories, were below the world average permissible level of 0.2  $\times 10^{-3}$  [15]. Hence, consumption of the water examined poses no health threat to anyone that takes it.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the radiological evaluation of  $^{222}\text{Rn}$  in several random samples of bottled water available in Benin City. The results demonstrate that the mean radon concentration is somewhat greater than the 0.1 Bq/L suggested by the Standard Organization of Nigeria [23] but still relatively low when compared to the standard levels recommended by the [24,15,25]. The computed annual effective dose to the general public via inhalation and ingestion in the study areas were lower than the 0.1 mSv/y limit recommended by [27] and 1 mSv/y [28]. The infants are mostly irradiated by consumption of these bottled waters. The age group evaluation of the lifetime cancer risk, were below the set limit of 0.2  $\times 10^{-3}$  [15]. By implication, consumption of the water examined poses no significant health hazard to consumers. Nevertheless, the water factories should improve on the purification process by employing a more effective radon reduction methods to ensure radon free water for consumption. Subsequently, the findings of this study might be used to establish a baseline for a radiological implication of radon in water in Edo State.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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