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Payam Dadvand,^{1,2,3} Jennifer Parker,⁴ Michelle L. Bell,⁵ Matteo Bonzini,⁶ Michael Brauer,⁷ Lyndsey A. Darrow,⁸ Ulrike Gehring,⁹ Svetlana V. Glinianaia,¹⁰ Nelson Gouveia,¹¹ Eun-hee Ha,¹² Jong Han Leem,¹³ Edith H. van den Hooven,^{14,15} Bin Jalaludin,^{16,17,18} Bill M. Jesdale,¹⁹ Johanna Lepeule,^{20,21,22} Rachel Morello-Frosch,^{19,23} Geoffrey G. Morgan,^{24,25} Angela Cecilia Pesatori,²⁶ Frank H. Pierik,¹⁵ Tanja Pless-Mulloli,¹⁰ David Q. Rich,²⁷ Sheela Sathyanarayana,²⁸ Juhee Seo,¹² Rémy Slama,^{21,22} Matthew Strickland,⁸ Lillian Tamburic,²⁹ Daniel Wartenberg,³⁰ Mark J Nieuwenhuijsen,^{1,2,3} Tracey J. Woodruff³¹

¹ Centre for Research in Environmental Epidemiology (CREAL), Barcelona, Spain

² Municipal Institute of Medical Research (IMIM-Hospital del Mar), Barcelona, Spain

³ CIBER Epidemiologia y Salud Pública (CIBERESP), Spain

⁴ National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Hyattsville, Maryland, USA

⁵ Yale University, School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, New Haven, Connecticut, USA

⁶ Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Insubria, Varese, Italy

⁷ University of British Columbia, School of Population and Public Health, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

⁸ Department of Environmental Health, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA

⁹ Institute for Risk Assessment Sciences, Utrecht University, Utrecht, the Netherlands

¹⁰ Institute of Health & Society, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, England, United Kingdom

¹¹ Department of Preventive Medicine, School of Medicine of the University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brasil

¹² Department of Preventive Medicine, Ewha Womans University, Seoul, Republic of Korea

- ¹³ Department of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Inha University, Incheon, Republic of Korea
- ¹⁴ Generation R Study Group, Erasmus Medical Center, Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- ¹⁵ Urban Environment and Safety, TNO, Utrecht, The Netherlands
- ¹⁶ Centre for Research, Evidence Management and Surveillance, Sydney, Australia
- ¹⁷ South Western Sydney Local Health Districts, Sydney, Australia
- ¹⁸ School of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
- ¹⁹ Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management, University of California–Berkeley, Berkeley, California, USA
- ²⁰ Department of Environmental Health, Harvard School of Public Health, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
- ²¹ Team of Environmental Epidemiology applied to Reproduction and Respiratory Health, INSERM, U823, Institut Albert Bonniot, Grenoble, France
- ²² Grenoble University, U823, Institut Albert Bonniot, Grenoble, France
- ²³ School of Public Health, University of California–Berkeley, Berkeley, California, USA
- ²⁴ North Coast Area Health Service, Lismore, New South Wales, Australia
- ²⁵ University Centre for Rural Health–North Coast, University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia
- ²⁶ Department of Occupational and Environmental Health, Università di Milano, Milan, Italy
- ²⁷ Department of Public Health Sciences, University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry, Rochester, New York, USA
- ²⁸ Seattle Children’s Research Institute, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA
- ²⁹ University of British Columbia, Centre for Health Services and Policy Research, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
- ³⁰ UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, Piscataway, New Jersey, USA
- ³¹ Center for Reproductive Health and the Environment. University of California–San Francisco, San Francisco, California, USA

Corresponding Author:

Payam Dadvand MD, PhD
CREAL
Barcelona Biomedical Research Park
Dr. Aiguader, 88
08003 Barcelona
Spain

Email: pdadvand@creal.cat

Tel +34 93 214 7317

Fax +34 93 316 0575

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Abbreviations

CI	Confidence Interval
ICAPPO	International Collaboration on Air Pollution and Pregnancy Outcomes
LBW	Low Birth Weight
OR	Odds Ratio
PAMPER	Particulate Matter and Perinatal Events Research
PM ₁₀	Particulate matter with aerodynamic diameter less than 10µm
PM _{2.5}	Particulate matter with aerodynamic diameter less than 2.5µm
SES	Socioeconomic status

Abstract

Background: A growing body of evidence has associated maternal exposure to air pollution with adverse effects on fetal growth; however, the existing literature is inconsistent.

Objectives: To quantify the association between maternal exposure to particulate air pollution and term birth weight and low birth weight (LBW) across fourteen centers from nine countries and to explore the influence of site characteristics and exposure assessment methods on between-center heterogeneity in this association.

Methods: Using a common analytical protocol, International Collaboration on Air Pollution and Pregnancy Outcomes (ICAPPO) centers generated effect estimates for term LBW and continuous birth weight associated with PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$. We used meta-analysis to combine the estimates of effect across centers (~3 million births) and used meta-regression to evaluate the influence of center characteristics and exposure assessment methods on between-center heterogeneity in reported effect estimates.

Results: In random effects meta-analyses, term LBW was positively associated with $10\text{-}\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in PM_{10} (OR = 1.03; 95% CI: 1.01, 1.05) and $PM_{2.5}$ (OR= 1.10; 95% CI: 1.03, 1.18) exposure during the entire pregnancy, adjusted for maternal socioeconomic status. $10\text{-}\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in PM_{10} exposure was also negatively associated with term birth weight as a continuous outcome in the fully adjusted random effects meta-analyses (-8.9g; 95% CI: -13.2, -4.6g). Meta-regressions revealed that centers with higher median $PM_{2.5}$ levels and $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$ ratios, and centers that used a temporal exposure assessment (compared to spatiotemporal), tended to report stronger associations.

Conclusion: Maternal exposure to particulate pollution was associated with low birth weight at term across study populations. We detected three site characteristics and aspects of exposure

assessment methodology that appeared to contribute to the variation in associations reported by centers.

Background

The developing fetus is known to be susceptible to environmental insults (Stillerman et al. 2008). A growing body of evidence has associated maternal exposure to ambient air pollution with a range of adverse pregnancy outcomes including low birth weight (LBW), intra-uterine growth retardation, preterm birth, stillbirth, and congenital anomalies (Glinianaia et al. 2004; Sapkota et al. 2010; Šrám et al. 2005; Vrijheid et al. 2011). However, notable inconsistencies among the findings of these studies (Parker et al. 2011; Parker and Woodruff 2008; Woodruff et al. 2009) have hindered the ability of policy makers to incorporate the research evidence into policy.

Discrepancies among previous studies may reflect genuine differences in the study settings, be a consequence of specific biases, or may arise from differences in study designs and exposure assessments (Parker and Woodruff 2008; Woodruff et al. 2009). Study setting characteristics that may contribute to variation in reported associations include the demographic characteristics of the study population, the major sources of pollutants, the size distribution of particulate pollutants (e.g. $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$ ratio), maternal time-activity patterns, the study period, the degree of confounding by socioeconomic status (SES), and the underlying prevalence of adverse pregnancy outcomes. Relevant study design characteristics include the sources of data for fetomaternal characteristics (e.g. birth certificates, questionnaires, or hospital records), inclusion/exclusion criteria, outcome definitions (e.g. birth weight as a continuous variable, LBW, or small for gestational age), and the analysis of potential confounders and/or effect modifiers. Differences in exposure assessment include applied methods for assessing the exposure (e.g. proximity-based, monitor-based, or model-based methods), exposure time

windows, exposure contrasts (e.g. spatial, temporal, or spatiotemporal), the availability of data for specific pollutants and the analysis of associations with combinations of pollutants (Parker and Woodruff 2008).

The International Collaboration on Air Pollution and Pregnancy Outcomes (ICAPPO) was established to investigate the association between maternal exposure to ambient air pollution and pregnancy outcomes across multiple centers and to understand how differences in study settings and methods contribute to variations in findings (i.e. between-center heterogeneity) (Parker et al. 2011; Woodruff et al. 2010; Woodruff et al. 2009). To achieve this goal, we previously discussed methodological differences in the published studies (Woodruff et al. 2009), described the collaborative centers (Woodruff et al. 2010), and presented preliminary estimates of effects for each center (Parker et al. 2011).

The overarching aim of this analysis was to evaluate the association between maternal exposure to particulate air pollution and term birth weight and LBW. Towards this aim, we combined effect estimates of the individual ICAPPO centers and assessed the between-center heterogeneity in these associations. The application of a common analysis protocol across ICAPPO centers provided a unique opportunity to separate the contribution of the analytical design to between-center heterogeneity and enabled us to assess the impact of center characteristics and utilized exposure assessment methods on the variation in reported effect estimates by each center.

Methods

Overview

Our study was based on estimates of effects (odds ratio (OR) for LBW and regression coefficients for birth weight) that were uniformly generated and reported by each ICAPPO center according to a common protocol (Parker et al. 2011). Ambient levels of particulate matter with aerodynamic diameter less than or equal to 10 μm (PM₁₀) and 2.5 μm (PM_{2.5}) were used as indicators of particulate air pollution. Our analysis was principally focused on the association between maternal exposure to PM₁₀ during the entire pregnancy and term LBW (birth weight < 2500g at 37-42 complete weeks of gestation) since this was reported by most ICAPPO centers. We also conducted additional analyses of data from subsets of ICAPPO centers that stratified PM₁₀-term LBW analyses by the exposure time window (i.e. the first, second, and third trimester), analyzed birth weight as a continuous outcome variable, and estimated the association between maternal exposure to PM_{2.5} and term LBW. The effect estimates across the centers were synthesized by applying a meta-analysis framework. The effects of center characteristics and exposure assessment methods on between-center heterogeneity in effect estimates were explored using a meta-regression framework. The meta-analyses and meta-regressions were conducted using the R statistical package (<http://cran.r-project.org/>), libraries meta, rmeta, and metafor.

ICAPPO

Our analysis relied on effect estimates provided by fourteen ICAPPO centers from nine countries with more than three million singleton term births (Table 1). For the ICAPPO analysis, the centers reanalyzed existing datasets that had been created to evaluate the impacts of maternal

exposure to air pollution on pregnancy outcomes. The centers relied on outcome data available from routinely collected administrative records (birth certificates) or data collected for a specific study (Bell et al. 2007, 2008; Brauer et al. 2008; Darrow et al. 2011; Gehring et al. 2011; S. Glinianaia et al. 2008; Gouveia et al. 2004a, 2004b; Ha et al. 2004; Jalaludin et al. 2007; Lepeule et al. 2010; Mannes et al. 2005; Morello-Frosch et al. 2010; Pesatori et al. 2008; Rich et al. 2009; Slama et al. 2009; van den Hooven et al. 2009). More detailed description of the ICAPPO centers has been previously published (Parker et al. 2011; Woodruff et al. 2010).

Participating centers were initially asked to provide information on their study location and period, available air pollutants, number of births, prevalence of term LBW, exposure assessment method, and available covariate data (Parker et al. 2011; Woodruff et al. 2010). Based on this information, ICAPPO participants developed a common analytical protocol detailing the inclusion criteria, outcomes and covariates of interest, statistical models, and sensitivity analyses. This protocol also specified a standardized way of reporting the results (Parker et al. 2011). Each center was asked to reanalyze its existing dataset according to this protocol. The analyses were limited to live-born, singleton, term births with known birth weight, maternal education (or another measure of SES), dates of birth and conception, and ambient PM₁₀ or PM_{2.5} concentrations during the entire pregnancy.

Primary Meta-Analysis

According to the common protocol, ICAPPO centers initially estimated the association between term LBW and maternal exposure to PM₁₀ averaged over the entire pregnancy. Each center constructed three logistic regression models to estimate the odds of term LBW associated with

each 10- $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in average PM_{10} exposure levels during the entire pregnancy: 1) without any adjustment, 2) with adjustment only for maternal SES, and 3) with adjustment for maternal SES and center-specific covariates (e.g. maternal age, maternal ethnicity, maternal smoking, parity, and infant sex). For these center-specific covariates, there was no recommendation in the ICAPPO protocol and the centers had the flexibility to independently choose the suitable ones according to their settings. This selection of extra covariates used by each center has been reported elsewhere (Parker et al. 2011). The construction of these three models was to evaluate the effect of adjustment for the maternal SES and other covariates on the combined effect estimates.

ICAPPO participants chose maternal education as a common indicator of maternal SES (Parker et al. 2011). If maternal education data were not available, area-level measures of SES were used (PAMPER: Townsend Deprivation Score, Sydney: Index of Relative Socioeconomic Disadvantage, and Vancouver: percentage of women with postsecondary education). The PAMPER (Particulate Matter and Perinatal Events Research) study (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK) provided exposure data only for black smoke, which approximates particulate matter with an aerodynamic diameter less than 4 μm (PM_4) and has been shown to be a reasonable surrogate for PM_{10} (Muir and Laxen 1995). The estimates of effect for the PAMPER study were therefore analyzed alongside the studies with PM_{10} measures.

We used meta-analysis to estimate combined ORs across the centers. Between-center heterogeneity was quantified using the between-center variance of effect estimates, τ^2 . The statistical significance of between-center heterogeneity was tested by Cochran's Q test. The I^2

statistic with 95% confidence intervals (CI) was used to estimate the proportion of total variation in effect estimates across centers that was attributable to the between-center heterogeneity (τ^2) rather than within-center error (Higgins 2008). If there was significant between-center heterogeneity (i.e. Cochran's Q test p-value <0.05), DerSimonian-Laird random effects models were used for meta-analysis (DerSimonian and Laird 1986); otherwise, fixed-effect models were conducted using the Mantel–Haenszel method (Mantel and Haenszel 1959). Associations with a Cochran's Q test p-value between 0.05 and 0.10 were estimated using both fixed- and random effects models (Higgins et al. 2002).

Additional Meta-Analyses

Exposure window period

Nine centers analyzed the association between maternal exposure to PM₁₀ and term LBW stratified by the trimester of exposure and adjusted for maternal SES. We carried out meta-analyses using these reported stratified ORs to evaluate the impact of the exposure window period on the association between PM₁₀ exposure and term LBW.

Birth weight as a continuous variable

A subset of eleven centers (all centers but Connecticut & Massachusetts, New Jersey and Seattle) estimated the change in term birth weight as a continuous outcome variable (gram) associated with each 10- $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in PM₁₀ exposure levels averaged over the entire pregnancy using three sets of linear regression models with predictors as described for the primary analysis. The combined effect estimates across the centers were calculated using meta-analysis, as described above.

PM_{2.5} exposure

Seven centers had data on PM_{2.5} (Table 1) and reported the odds of term LBW associated with each 10- $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in average PM_{2.5} exposure levels during the entire pregnancy, using three sets of logistic regression models as described for the primary analysis. We synthesized the effect estimates across these centers using meta-analysis as described before.

Sensitivity Analyses

We checked the robustness of all meta-analyses results to the omission of influential centers that were identified using DFBETAS, which indicates the change in estimated coefficients after excluding a center from the meta-analysis (Viechtbauer and Cheung 2010). Centers with an absolute DFBETAS value greater than one (i.e. that resulted in one standard deviation or greater change in the estimated coefficient when omitted) were considered influential (Viechtbauer and Cheung 2010).

Meta-regressions

To assess between-center heterogeneity, we hypothesized that the following characteristics of the centers could have an impact on the estimated risk by each center: study area (km^2), length of the study (years), number of births, continent of the study location, latitude of the study location (degrees), percentage of term LBW births, median PM₁₀ exposure levels ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), median PM_{2.5} exposure levels ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), inter-quartile range of PM₁₀ exposure levels ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), and PM_{2.5}/PM₁₀ ratio. In addition, we hypothesized that the use of model-based vs. monitor-based exposure assessment, and temporal vs. spatiotemporal exposure contrasts could influence center-specific

estimates. Temporal exposure contrasts account for temporal variation in pollutant levels by assigning measurements from a single monitoring station to all study subjects, whereas, spatiotemporal contrasts account for both spatial and temporal components of variation in air pollution levels when estimating exposure.

For associations between maternal PM_{10} exposure during the entire pregnancy and term LBW that showed between-center heterogeneity, we performed separate univariate meta-regressions using center-specific log-transformed ORs as outcome and each of the center or exposure assessment characteristics listed above as predictors. In effect, these meta-regressions quantified the potential impact of these factors on the estimates of effects (ORs) reported by each center. We excluded the Generation R center from the analysis comparing temporal and spatiotemporal exposure contrasts because its exposure assessment was based on a dispersion model, which is essentially a spatial approach without any temporal adjustment. Analyses of the influence of $PM_{2.5}$ and $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$ ratios were based on the seven centers with $PM_{2.5}$ data.

Results

Characteristics of ICAPPO centers

Of the fourteen ICAPPO centers included in our analyses (Table 1), six were North American, five European, one South American, one Asian, and one was Oceanian. Our analysis included over 3 million births (ranging from a little over 1,000 to almost two million) generally occurring between late 1990s and mid 2000s.

Primary Meta-Analysis

Thirteen centers provided estimates for the association between maternal exposure to PM₁₀ and term LBW (see Figure 1A and Supplemental Material, Figure S1 for forest plots). There was statistically significant (Cochran's Q test p-value <0.05) between-center heterogeneity in effect estimates (ORs) reported by these centers, with τ^2 ranging between 0.0003 and 0.0004 (Table 2). Therefore we used random effects models to estimate combined ORs across the centers, which indicated a positive association between term LBW and average maternal exposure to PM₁₀ during the entire pregnancy before adjustment (OR = 1.04; 95% CI: 1.01, 1.06) and after adjustment for SES (OR = 1.03; 95% CI: 1.01, 1.05) and SES plus center-specific covariates (OR = 1.02; 95% CI: 1.01, 1.04) (Table 2).

Additional Meta-Analyses

Exposure window period

Nine centers reported estimates for the association between PM₁₀ and term LBW stratified by the trimester of exposure and adjusted for maternal SES (see Supplemental Material, Figures S2 for

forest plots). All combined trimester-specific ORs for term LBW in association with a $10\text{-}\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in PM_{10} were positive and comparable in magnitude based on fixed-effect models adjusted for maternal SES, with ORs of 1.01 (95% CI: 1.01, 1.01), 1.01 (95% CI: 1.01, 1.02), and 1.02 (95% CI: 1.01, 1.02) for the first, second and third trimesters, respectively (Table 3). Corresponding random effects ORs were smaller, with a combined OR for the first trimester of 1.0 (95% CI: 1.00, 1.01) (Cochran's Q test p-value = 0.06; $I^2 = 45.8\%$; 95% CI: 0, 74.9%) (Table 3).

Birth weight as a continuous variable

Eleven centers estimated the change in term birth weight as a continuous outcome variable (gram) associated with each $10\text{-}\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in PM_{10} exposure levels (see Figure 1B and Supplemental Material, Figure S3 for forest plots). The Cochran's Q test of heterogeneity was significant ($p < 0.05$) for all meta-analyses of PM_{10} and birth weight (data not shown). Random effects meta-analyses indicated a negative association between term birth weight and a $10\text{-}\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in PM_{10} , with unadjusted, SES-adjusted, and SES plus center-specific covariate adjusted estimated decreases of -2.7g (95% CI: -7.2, 1.7g, p-value=0.23), -3.0g (95% CI: -6.9, 0.9g, p-value=0.13), and -8.9g (95% CI: -13.2, -4.6g, p-value <0.01), respectively.

PM_{2.5} exposure

Seven centers reported the odds of term LBW associated with each $10\text{-}\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ exposure levels (see Figure 1C and Supplemental Material, Figure S4 for forest plots). All meta-analyses showed statistically significant between-study heterogeneity (Table 2). The random effects meta-analyses demonstrated positive associations with term LBW, with statistically

significant ORs based on unadjusted and SES-adjusted models, but not the model adjusted for maternal SES and center-specific covariates (Table 2).

Sensitivity Analyses

The studies that were most frequently classified as influential were the California study (the largest center with more than 1.7 million births), the PAMPER study (covering a long time period with wide variation in sources and levels of exposure to black smoke, which was used as a surrogate for PM₁₀), and the Lombardy study (a relatively large study of a heterogeneous region including a metropolitan area (Milan), a large mainly agricultural area (Po valley), and a northern mountainous area) (Supplemental Material, Table S1). The meta-analyses were generally robust to the exclusion of influential studies with regard to the magnitude of the estimated associations (data not shown), but there were some exceptions. For example, the unadjusted OR for LBW with a 10- $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in PM_{2.5} increased from 1.17 (95% CI: 1.08, 1.26) to 1.20 (95% CI: 1.00, 1.45) after California was excluded, and decreased to 1.06 (95% CI: 0.99, 1.13) after exclusion of Connecticut and Massachusetts. In addition, the average estimated reduction in SES-adjusted term birth weight with a 10- $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in PM₁₀ (random effects model) increased from -3.0g (95% CI: -6.9, 0.9g) based on all centers (Figure 1B) to -5.5g (95% CI: -9.3, -1.6g) after excluding Atlanta, and to -4.9g (95% CI: -8.6, -1.1g) after excluding Lombardy. Similarly, the reduction in unadjusted mean birth weight increased from -2.7g (95% CI: -7.2, 1.7g) based on all centers (Supplemental Material, Figure S3A) to -6.6g (95% CI: -11.7, -1.5g) and -5.0g (95% CI: -10.0, 0.0g) after removing Atlanta and Lombardy, respectively.

Meta-regressions

Of the characteristics we evaluated, median $PM_{2.5}$ exposure levels, $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$ ratio, and exposure contrast (temporal vs. spatiotemporal approach) influenced the between-center heterogeneity in the reported PM_{10} -term LBW associations, with centers that had higher median $PM_{2.5}$ exposure levels and $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$ ratios, and that used a temporal exposure contrast, reporting stronger associations in most cases (Table 4). The results of leave-one-out sensitivity analyses for these three meta-regressions were generally consistent with those of meta-regressions including all centers (data not shown). However, removing Connecticut and Massachusetts almost doubled the meta-regression coefficient for the $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$ ratio and nullified the association for median $PM_{2.5}$ exposure levels, and the meta-regression estimate for median $PM_{2.5}$ exposure levels was null after New Jersey was excluded.

Meta-regressions for the exposure contrast showed statistically significant heterogeneity in residuals (from both unadjusted and SES-adjusted models), whereas, meta-regressions of the median $PM_{2.5}$ exposure levels and $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$ ratios did not (Table 4). Heterogeneity was reduced when ORs were adjusted for center-specific selection of covariates in addition to SES. Associations between center-specific log-ORs and other center or study characteristics were not statistically significant (data not shown).

Discussion

To our knowledge, this study is the largest multi-center study so-far reporting on the association between air pollution and fetal growth using a common analytical protocol. We synthesized reported estimates of effects by fourteen ICAPPO centers across the globe and for the first time quantified the impacts of study settings and aspects of applied exposure assessment methods on between-center heterogeneity in the reported effect estimates (ORs) for this association. We found that maternal exposures to PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} during the entire pregnancy were positively associated with term LBW. For PM₁₀, all trimester-specific exposures were associated with slightly increased odds of term LBW. Furthermore, term birth weight was reduced in association with average PM₁₀ exposure over the entire pregnancy. Most associations showed between-center heterogeneity in the center-specific estimates of associations. Meta-regression assessments of factors possibly affecting PM₁₀-term LBW associations indicated that heterogeneity was influenced by median PM_{2.5} exposure levels, the PM_{2.5}/PM₁₀ ratio, and the applied exposure contrast (temporal vs. spatiotemporal).

Primary Meta-analyses

Making decisions about the risks from environmental exposure in the policy or clinical setting requires synthesizing and interpreting the available epidemiologic evidence, which may include a number of relevant studies with different designs. A recent systematic review and meta-analysis of the available evidence on the association between particulate pollution and pregnancy outcomes reported by Sapkota et al. (2010) estimated a combined OR of 1.02 (95% CI: 0.99, 1.05) for LBW in association with a 10- $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in average maternal PM₁₀ exposure

during pregnancy. Our estimates, which were based on center-specific ORs estimated using a common protocol, were slightly more precise than reported by Sapkota et al. (e.g., OR 1.03; 95% CI: 1.01, 1.05 for a 10- $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in average maternal PM_{10} exposure based on SES-adjusted estimates), but both point estimates support a comparable deleterious effect of PM_{10} on term birth weight, an indicator of fetal growth. This comparable finding supports not overlying on statistical significance nor using it as deciding factor in the evaluation of the evidence, but rather describe the degree of confidence and precision of the estimate, which is consistent with other scientific writings on this topic. Bacchetti, for example, cautions against inappropriate reliance on statistical significance and rather support the decision making process describe the degree of confidence in the findings and the effect size (Bacchetti et al. 2008; Bacchetti et al. 2005). As we have shown by comparing our results to those of Sapkota et al, even though we were able to improve the signal to noise ratio using our approach, the interpretation of the relationship between air pollution and fetal growth remained similar.

The consistency of our findings with those of Sapkota et al. and also our observed consistency of combined ORs and between-center heterogeneity (τ^2 values) for meta-analyses of ORs adjusted for center-specific covariates as well as meta-analyses of unadjusted or SES-adjusted ORs gives us confidence that synthesizing effect estimates for the air pollution-pregnancy outcomes associations reported by studies with different designs would be informative. This feasibility could be important for policy-makers in incorporating the research evidence into policy, for example, by including estimates of fetal growth in the future reviews of air quality standards.

ICCAPO centers conducted unadjusted and SES-adjusted analyses according to a common analysis protocol, as well as analyses that allowed center-specific selection of covariates. In combining results across centers there were clear trade-offs to the two approaches. Strictly specifying the models and covariates to be consistent across centers was one way to reduce methodological differences between centers. However, there might be important center-specific considerations that required inclusion of certain covariates for validity. For example, the Atlanta results relied entirely on temporal contrasts of exposure over an 11-year time period, and failing to control for long-term time trends, as was done in the unadjusted and SES-adjusted analyses, may have led to temporal confounding. This might explain why ORs adjusted for center-specific selection of covariates were different from those unadjusted or adjusted for SES only in some cases.

Additional Meta-Analyses

In their meta-analysis, Sapkota et al. estimated the association between LBW and maternal PM₁₀ exposure during the first trimester (five studies) and third trimester (seven studies), but did not detect associations with exposure in either trimester (OR = 1.00; 95% CI: 0.97, 1.03 and OR = 1.00; 95% CI: 0.99, 1.01, respectively). We estimated slightly increased relative risks of term LBW in association with PM₁₀ exposure during all trimesters, consistent with other previous reports (Parker and Woodruff 2008; Parker et al. 2005).

Because Cochran's Q test of heterogeneity p-values for the trimester-specific analyses of PM₁₀ and LBW were between 0.05 and 0.10, we reported results of both fixed-effect and random effects meta-analyses (Higgins et al. 2002). For the second and third trimesters, there were no

notable differences in estimates between the two models, whereas, the random effects OR for the association with first trimester PM₁₀ was null. Given the evidence of heterogeneity, fixed-effect model estimates for this trimester should be interpreted with caution.

Combined ORs for term birth weight as a continuous variable indicated a reduction in term birth weight associated with a 10- $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in average PM₁₀ exposure during the entire pregnancy (-2.7 g; 95% CI: -7.2, 1.7g). The association was stronger when based on ORs adjusted for maternal SES and center-specific covariates (-8.9g; 95% CI: -13.2, -4.6g). This may be partly explained by adjustment for gestational age at delivery by nine centers. Gestational age at delivery could confound the association between maternal exposure to air pollution and fetal growth. Although the outcome was term birth weight or LBW, there could be a six-week difference (between 37 and 42 weeks of gestation) in gestational age at delivery. Confounding by gestational age might have had a stronger effect on the continuous birth weight analyses than the LBW analyses.

LBW was associated with maternal PM_{2.5} exposure (combined random effects OR = 1.10; 95% CI: 1.03, 1.18 for a 10- $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in average PM_{2.5} based on SES-adjusted ORs). The strength and direction of this association was comparable with the meta-analysis OR reported by Sapkota et al. (OR = 1.09; 95% CI: 0.90, 1.32) (Sapkota et al. 2010).

Meta-regressions

To our best knowledge, the impact of study characteristics and exposure assessment methods on estimated associations between adverse birth weight and maternal exposure to air pollution has

not been evaluated previously. Median $PM_{2.5}$ exposure levels, $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$ ratios, and temporal vs. spatiotemporal exposure contrasts appeared to influence the estimates of effects reported by the study centers. Parker and Woodruff (2008) suggested that variation in the composition of particulate matter may have contributed to differences in associations between maternal exposure to particulate pollution and fetal growth among seven different regions in the US (Parker and Woodruff 2008). However, we did not have data on the composition of particulate pollutants, and therefore were not able to investigate its impact.

In our analysis, meta-regressions of the influence of temporal versus spatiotemporal exposure contrasts on associations between PM_{10} and LBW generally showed strong evidence of residual heterogeneity, in contrast meta-regressions of median $PM_{2.5}$ exposure levels and $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$ ratios (Table 4). These findings could suggest that at least part of the effect of the exposure contrast on PM_{10} -term LBW associations might have been secondary to the effect of $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$ ratios and median $PM_{2.5}$ levels at each center.

Limitations

Our meta-regressions were based on effect estimates (ORs) from 13 ICAPPO centers. As a rule of thumb, it has been suggested that ten effect estimates are required in order to include a covariate in meta-regression (Borenstein et al. 2009). We therefore had to limit our analysis to univariate rather than multivariate meta-regressions and test the effects of each covariate separately. As a result, we could not evaluate whether our univariate results were confounded by other factors. Furthermore, other center characteristics that could have affected center-specific

effect estimates, such as the prevalence of maternal smoking, were not included in our meta-regression analyses.

The ICAPPO protocol did not include data that might have been used to better characterize personal exposure, such as direct measurements of personal exposure levels (e.g. personal monitor data), pollutant levels at micro-environmental levels (i.e. indoor, outdoor, commuting, etc.) or maternal time-activity patterns. Some exposure misclassification would have resulted from the use of effect estimates based on associations with ambient levels of pollutants as a surrogate for personal exposure levels.

Conclusion

Our combined effect estimates, which were based on effect estimates generated by fourteen ICAPPO centers across the globe using a common analytical protocol, support an adverse impact of maternal exposure to particulate pollution on fetal growth. The estimated combined associations, although relatively small, could be of major public health importance considering the ubiquitous nature of particulate air pollution exposure and therefore the potential for considerable population attributable risks, particularly given evidence of both perinatal and life-long effects of LBW on health (Balci et al. 2010; Gibson 2007). After reducing analytical differences as a possible source of heterogeneity by using a common protocol, we found that some of the heterogeneity in effect estimates by centers could be explained by differences in median $PM_{2.5}$ exposure levels, $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$ ratios, suggesting geographical variation in the

association between air pollution and fetal growth. In general, the direction and strength of combined estimates of association and between-center heterogeneity based on unadjusted and SES-adjusted ORs were consistent with combined estimates based on ORs adjusted for center-specific covariates. These findings highlight the contribution of study settings to inconsistencies in the available literature and can therefore increase the confidence of policy-makers when summarizing existing evidence and translating it into policy.

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Table 1. Exposure assessment methodologies and characteristics of the ICAPPO centers.

Center	Location	Study Period	Study Area (km ²)	Number of births	Measure of SES	Term LBW (%)	Median PM ₁₀ (µg/m ³)	PM ₁₀ IQR (µg/m ³)	Median PM _{2.5} (µg/m ³)	PM _{2.5} /PM ₁₀ ratio ^a	Exposure Assessment	Exposure Contrast
Atlanta ^b	Atlanta. USA	1996-2004	4538	325221	Maternal education	2.62	23.5	3.1	15.8	0.67	Monitor	Temporal
California ^c	California. USA	1996-2006	423970	1714509	Maternal education	2.43	28.9	16.1	16.5	0.57	Monitor	Spatiotemporal
Connecticut & Massachusetts ^d	Connecticut & Massachusetts. USA	1999-2002	41692	173042	Maternal education	2.16	22	7.4	20	0.91	Monitor	Spatiotemporal
EDEN ^e	Poitiers & Nancy. France	2003-2006	480	1233	Age at completion of education	2.11	19	3	-	-	Monitor	Spatiotemporal
Lombardy ^f	Lombardy. Italy	2004-2006	23865	213542	Maternal education	2.71	49	10	-	-	Monitor	Spatiotemporal
PAMPER ^g	Newcastle upon Tyne. UK	1962-1992	63	81953	Area-level indicator ^h	3.19	32.8 ⁱ	87.8 ⁱ	-	-	Model	Spatiotemporal
New Jersey ^j	New Jersey. USA	1999-2003	22592	87281	Maternal education	2.75	28	6.9	13.7	0.49	Monitor	Spatiotemporal
PIAMA ^k	North, West, and Center of The Netherlands	1996-1997	12000	3471	Maternal education	1.15	40.5	6.7	20.3	0.50	Model	Spatiotemporal
Generation R ^l	Rotterdam. Netherlands	2002-2006	150	7296	Maternal education	2.26	32.8	1.1	-	-	Model	Spatial
São Paulo ^m	São Paulo. Brazil	2005	1500	158791	Maternal education	3.77	40.3	2.9	-	-	Monitor	Temporal
Seattle ⁿ	Seattle. USA	1998-2005	17800	301880	Maternal education	1.56	-	-	10.2	-	Monitor	Spatiotemporal
Seoul ^o	Seoul. South Korea	1998-2000	605	372319	Maternal education	1.45	66.5	10.9	-	-	Monitor	Temporal
Sydney ^p	Sydney. Australia	1998-2004	12145	279015	Area-level indicator ^q	1.62	16.5	8.2	-	-	Monitor	Temporal
Vancouver ^r	Vancouver. Canada	1999-2002	3300	66467	Area-level indicator ^s	1.35	12.5	1.4	3.98	0.32	Monitor	Spatiotemporal

a Ratio of PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} median levels; b (Darrow et al. 2011); c (Morello-Frosch et al. 2010); d (Bell et al. 2007, 2008); e (Lepeule et al. 2010); f (Pesatori et al. 2008); g (SV. Glinianaia et al. 2008); h The Townsend Deprivation Score is an area-based measure of material deprivation calculated for each enumeration district (~ 200 households) based on

1971, 1981, and 1991 census data; i Black smoke (\sim PM₄) was used as a measure of particulate air pollution; j (Rich et al. 2009); k (Gehring et al. 2011); l (van den Hooven et al. 2009); m (Gouveia et al. 2004a); n (Sathyanarayana S, Karr C, unpublished data); o (Ha et al. 2004); p (Jalaludin et al. 2007); q The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage uses a range of census factors and is assigned to each census collection district (\sim 200 households); r (Brauer et al. 2008); s The percentage of women with postsecondary education.

Table 2. Combined random effects odds ratios (95% confidence intervals (CI)) for term low birth weight in association with a 10- $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in average maternal exposure to PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ during pregnancy, and corresponding indicators of between-center heterogeneity across ICAPPO centers.

Meta-analysis	Combined Estimate		Heterogeneity		
	Odds Ratio (95% CI)	p-value	τ^2	p-value ^a	I^2 (95% CI)
PM₁₀ (13 Centers)					
Unadjusted	1.04 (1.01, 1.06)	<0.01	0.0004	< 0.01	76.5% (59.9%, 86.2%)
Adjusted for maternal SES	1.03 (1.01, 1.05)	<0.01	0.0003	< 0.01	79.4% (65.4%, 87.7%)
Adjusted for maternal SES and center-specific covariates	1.02 (1.01, 1.04)	0.01	0.0003	0.01	54.3% (14.5%, 75.6%)
PM_{2.5} (7 Centers)^b					
Unadjusted	1.17 (1.08, 1.26)	<0.01	0.0055	<0.01	92.3% (86.7%, 95.6%)
Adjusted for maternal SES	1.10 (1.03, 1.18)	<0.01	0.0039	<0.01	89.7% (81.3%, 94.3%)
Adjusted for maternal SES and center-specific covariates	1.04 (0.99, 1.09)	0.09	0.0013	<0.01	68.5% (30.4%, 85.7%)

a p-value for Cochran's Q test for heterogeneity.

b Including Atlanta, California, Connecticut & Massachusetts, New Jersey, PIAMA, Seattle, and Vancouver.

Table 3. Combined adjusted^a odds ratios (95% confidence intervals (CI)) of term low birth weight in association with 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in average of PM_{10} exposure levels during each trimester of exposure^b.

Trimester of Exposure	Combined Risk		Heterogeneity	
	Odds Ratio (95% CI)	p-value	I ² (95% CI)	p-value ^c
1st Trimester (Fixed-effect model)	1.01 (1.01, 1.01)	< 0.001	45.8% (0.0%, 74.9%)	0.064
1st Trimester (Random effects model)	1.00 (1.00, 1.01)	0.325		
2nd Trimester (Fixed-effect model)	1.01 (1.01, 1.02)	< 0.001	25.7% (0.0%, 65.2%)	0.213
2nd Trimester (Random effects model)	1.01 (1.01, 1.02)	< 0.001		
3rd Trimester (Fixed-effect model)	1.02 (1.01, 1.02)	< 0.001	42.7% (0.0%, 73.6%)	0.075
3rd Trimester (Random effects model)	1.01 (1.00, 1.02)	0.001		

a Adjusted for maternal socioeconomic status.

b Odds ratios from nine centers were included in the meta-analysis.

c p-value for Cochran's Q test for heterogeneity.

Table 4. Meta-regression coefficients (95% confidence intervals (CI)) from separate models estimating the effect of a 1- $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in the center median $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ level, a 100% increase in $\text{PM}_{2.5}/\text{PM}_{10}$ ratio, or the use of a temporal versus spatiotemporal exposure contrast on SES-adjusted center-specific log-odds ratios for the association between a 10- $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in mean PM_{10} during pregnancy and term low birth weight.

Meta-regression	Temporal vs. spatiotemporal approach ^{a,b}		Median $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ levels		$\text{PM}_{2.5}/\text{PM}_{10}$ Ratio	
	Regression Coefficient (95% CI)	Residual Heterogeneity (τ^2) (95% CI)	Regression Coefficient (95% CI)	Residual Heterogeneity (τ^2) (95% CI)	Regression Coefficient (95% CI)	Residual Heterogeneity (τ^2) (95% CI)
Unadjusted	0.07 (0.03, 0.11)	0.0033 (0.0007, 0.0259)*	0.03 (0.01, 0.05)	0.0105 (0.0, 0.3901)	0.47 (0.13, 0.82)	0.0019 (0.0, 0.3808)
Adjusted for maternal SES	0.08 (0.05, 0.12)	0.0015 (0.0001, 0.0116)*	0.02 (0.00, 0.04)	0.0077 (0.0, 0.3405)	0.39 (0.15, 0.64)	0.0010 (0.0, 0.3776)
Adjusted for maternal SES & center-specific covariates	0.06 (0.02, 0.10)	0.0006 (0.0, 0.0079)	0.01 (0.00, 0.03)	0.0 (0.0, 0.0608)	0.19 (0.01, 0.37)	0.0 (0.0, 0.1421)

* Cochran's Q test p-value <0.05

a Regression coefficients for using temporal approach compared with the spatiotemporal approach.

b Generation R cohort was excluded because its exposure assessment was based on a dispersion model which is a spatial approach.

Figure Legend

Figure 1. Forest plots for the random effects meta-analysis of the SES-adjusted odds ratio (95% confidence interval) for the associations between term LBW and PM₁₀ exposure during the entire pregnancy (A), term birth weight and PM₁₀ exposure during the entire pregnancy (B), and between term LBW and PM_{2.5} exposure during the entire pregnancy (C).