

**NICKEL CADMIUM MERCURY AND OXIDATIVE STRESS STATUS OF
TOMATOES FROM IKPOBA HILL AND OBA MARKET IN BENIN CITY**

BY

PROMISE CHIMIEZE OBIALOR

LSC1806560

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND
TOXICOLOGY**

COURSE: PROJECT (EMT 599)

APRIL 2024

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**AN UNDERGRADUATE DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND TOXICOLOGY, FACULTY OF LIFE
SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, EDO STATE, NIGERIA; IN
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE DEGREE IN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND
TOXICOLOGY.**

APRIL, 2024

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research titled “**NICKEL CADMIUM MERCURY AND OXIDATIVE STRESS STATUS OF TOMATOES FROM IKPOBA HILL AND OBA MARKET IN BENIN CITY**”

,” was carried out by “**PROMISE CHIMIEZE OBIALOR**” and presented to the Department of Environmental Management and Toxicology, Faculty of Life Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City; in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) in Environmental Management and Toxicology. It was conducted under suitable conditions, was carefully supervised and subsequently approved as having met the requirements for the award of Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Management and Toxicology.

DR. OGBEIDE OZEKEKE
(Project Supervisor)

DATE

PROF. A.A. ENUNEKU
(Head of Department)

DATE

DECLARATION

I **“PROMISE CHIMIEZE OBIALOR”** declare that **“NICKEL CADMIUM MERCURY AND OXIDATIVE STRESS STATUS OF TOMATOES FROM IKPOBA HILL AND OBA MARKET IN BENIN CITY,”** is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references and that this work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other University.

OBIALOR PROMISE CHIMEZIE

DATE

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the God Almighty and my mummy for His unfailing love and support and my project supervisor Dr ogbeide ozekeke for his effort and Dr Grace ogbeide that made this project exercise a big success.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank God for his grace and love. I specially want to acknowledge my lovely parents **Mr. and Mrs. Obialor** and my siblings for their prayers and support. I wish to express my profound gratitude entire staff of great environmental management and toxicology department of University of Benin. I also wish to commend the efforts of my project supervisor in the person of **Dr Ogbeide Ozekeke** and **Dr Mrs Graces ogbeide** for their guidance and encouragement throughout the period of my project despite his busy schedule.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Head of Department, **Prof. A.A Enuneka**, as well as all the lecturers and non-lecturers in the Department of Environmental Management and Toxicology. Your collective efforts and knowledge have been invaluable to my academic growth and development.

My appreciation also goes to **Dr Nosa** for his Encouragement

I appreciate **Dr. MRS I.H. Igbinosa** for her coordination during the course of the project

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ABSTRACT

Heavy metal in vegetables pose a significant health risk due to

This study investigated the levels of nickel (Ni), cadmium (Cd), and mercury (Hg) contamination in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market in Benin City, as well as their oxidative stress status. The concentrations of Ni, Cd, and Hg in tomatoes were determined using atomic absorption spectroscopy (AAS), while the oxidative stress status was assessed by measuring the activities of antioxidant enzymes and levels of lipid peroxidation. The results showed that tomatoes from both locations were contaminated with varying levels of Ni, Cd, with higher concentrations observed in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill compared to Oba Market. Specifically, the mean concentrations of Ni, Cd, and Hg in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill were Ni $[0.05 \pm 0.02]$ mg/kg, Cd (0.01 ± 0.009) mg/kg, and Hg [ND], respectively, while in tomatoes from Oba Market, the concentrations were Ni $[0.06 \pm 0.02]$ mg/kg, Cd [0] mg/kg, and [Hg] ND, respectively. Additionally, tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill exhibited higher levels of lipid peroxidation and lower activities of antioxidant enzymes, including superoxide dismutase (SOD), catalase (CAT), and peroxidase (POD), compared to Oba Market. The activities of SOD, CAT, and POD in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill were SOD $[3.017 \pm 0.22]$, CAT $[0.07 \pm 0.007]$, and MDA $[0.49 - 0.06]$ U/mg protein, respectively, while in tomatoes from Oba Market, the activities were $[3.17 \pm 0.22]$, $[0.14 \pm 0.01]$, and $[4.84 \pm 0.28]$ U/mg protein, respectively. The levels of lipid peroxidation, as indicated by the concentration of malondialdehyde (MDA), were higher in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill compared to Oba Market, with values of $[9.00 \times 10^{-18}]$ nmol/mg protein and $[3.00 \times 10^{-22}]$ nmol/mg protein, respectively. Despite the higher levels of heavy metal contamination and oxidative stress in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill, the concentrations of Ni, Cd, and Hg in tomatoes from both locations were below the maximum allowable limits set by the World Health Organization (WHO), suggesting that tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market are generally safe for consumption in terms of heavy metal contamination.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of study

Tomatoes (*Solanumlycopersicum*) are one of the most important vegetable crops worldwide, valued for their nutritional content, flavor, and culinary versatility. In Nigeria, tomatoes are a staple food and an essential source of essential nutrients such as vitamins A and C, potassium, and antioxidants. However, the quality and safety of tomatoes can be compromised by environmental contaminants, including heavy metals such as nickel (Ni), cadmium (Cd), and mercury (Hg). (Sharma and Dubey, 2022).

Heavy metals are naturally occurring elements that can be found in the environment due to both natural processes and human activities. In urban areas like Benin City, Nigeria, industrial activities, vehicular emissions, and agricultural practices can lead to the accumulation of heavy metals in the soil, water, and air. Once in the environment, these heavy metals can be taken up by plants, including tomatoes, and accumulate in their tissues. (Ali *et al.*, 2019).

Nickel (Ni) is a ubiquitous environmental contaminant that can induce oxidative stress in plants. Ni exposure has been shown to lead to reduced growth, chlorosis, and oxidative damage in tomatoes (Sharma *et al.*, 2019). Cadmium (Cd) is another toxic heavy metal that can accumulate in plants and disrupt cellular processes. Cd exposure in tomatoes can lead to oxidative stress, reduced growth, and photosynthetic activity

(Liu *et al.*, 2019). Mercury (Hg) is also a significant environmental contaminant that can negatively impact plant health and productivity. Although less studied compared to Ni and Cd, Hg exposure in tomatoes can induce oxidative stress and reduce growth and photosynthetic efficiency (Ali *et al.*, 2018).

Oxidative stress occurs when there is an imbalance between the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and the ability of the plant to detoxify them. ROS, such as superoxide radicals, hydrogen peroxide, and hydroxyl radicals, can cause damage to cellular components such as lipids, proteins, and DNA. To counteract the harmful effects of ROS, plants have developed antioxidant defense mechanisms, including enzymatic antioxidants such as superoxide dismutase (SOD), catalase (CAT), and peroxidase (POD), as well as non-enzymatic antioxidants like glutathione (GSH).(Ali *et al* 2021)

The oxidative stress status of tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market in Benin City is of particular interest due to the high levels of industrial and vehicular activities in these areas, which can lead to increased levels of heavy metal contamination in the soil and air. Understanding the oxidative stress status of tomatoes from these areas is crucial for ensuring the safety and quality of this important food crop.(Sharma, A.,)

1.2 Aim of the study

Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market in Benin City are areas known for their high levels of industrial and vehicular activities, which can lead to increased levels of heavy metal contamination in the soil and air. These heavy metals, including Ni, Cd, and Hg, are known to induce oxidative stress in plants, which can have detrimental effects on plant growth, development, and ultimately, the quality of the produce.

Despite the potential risks associated with heavy metal contamination, there is limited information available on the levels of Ni, Cd, and Hg in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market, as well as their impact on the oxidative stress status of the tomatoes.

Therefore, the main problems addressed by this study is:

1. What are the levels of nickel (Ni), cadmium (Cd), and mercury (Hg) contamination in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market in Benin City?
2. What is the oxidative stress status of tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market, as indicated by the activities of antioxidant enzymes and levels of lipid peroxidation?
3. How do the levels of heavy metal contamination and oxidative stress in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market compare to each other?

1.3 Objectives of study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the levels of Ni, Cd, and Hg contamination in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market in Benin City and assess their impact on the oxidative stress status of the tomatoes. Specific objectives include:

1. To determine the concentrations of Ni, Cd, and Hg in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market.
2. To assess the oxidative stress status of tomatoes from these areas by measuring the activities of antioxidant enzymes and levels of lipid peroxidation.
3. To compare the levels of heavy metal contamination and oxidative stress in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Nickel (Ni), cadmium (Cd), and mercury (Hg) are heavy metals that are widely distributed in the environment due to natural and anthropogenic activities (Sharma *et al.*, 2019). Industrial processes, vehicular emissions, and agricultural practices are major sources of heavy metal pollution, leading to their accumulation in soils, water bodies, and plants (Liu *et al.*, 2019).

Heavy metals can enter the food chain through the consumption of contaminated crops, posing serious health risks to humans (Ali *et al.*, 2018). Tomatoes (*Solanumlycopersicum*) are among the most consumed vegetables globally and are known to accumulate heavy metals from the soil and water (Zhu *et al.*, 2020).

The presence of heavy metals in tomatoes can lead to oxidative stress, which occurs when there is an imbalance between the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and the ability of the plant to detoxify them (Sharma *et al.*, 2020). ROS, such as superoxide radicals, hydrogen peroxide, and hydroxyl radicals, can cause damage to cellular components, including lipids, proteins, and DNA, leading to cell death (Sharma *et al.*, 2019).

2.2 Heavy Metal Contamination in Plants

Heavy metal contamination in plants is a widespread environmental concern that can have significant impacts on plant health and food safety (Liu *et al.*, 2019). Nickel (Ni), cadmium (Cd), and mercury (Hg) are among the most common heavy metals found in the environment, with industrial activities and urbanization being major sources of contamination (Sharma *et al.*, 2019). These heavy metals can enter plants through various pathways, including uptake from contaminated soil, water, and air (Ali *et al.*, 2018). Once inside the plant, heavy metals can accumulate in different tissues, including roots, stems, leaves, and fruits, depending on factors such as metal availability, plant species, and environmental conditions (Zhu *et al.*, 2020).

The accumulation of heavy metals in plants can have adverse effects on plant growth, development, and physiology. For example, high concentrations of Ni, Cd, and Hg can inhibit plant growth, disrupt nutrient uptake, and impair photosynthetic activity (Liu *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, heavy metal contamination can lead to oxidative stress in plants, as these metals can induce the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and disrupt antioxidant defense mechanisms (Sharma *et al.*, 2020).

2.3 Impact of Heavy Metals on Oxidative

Stress

Heavy metals such as nickel (Ni), cadmium (Cd), and mercury (Hg) can induce oxidative stress in plants by generating reactive oxygen species (ROS) and disrupting antioxidant defense mechanisms (Sharma *et al.*, 2019). ROS, including superoxide radicals, hydrogen peroxide, and hydroxyl radicals, are highly reactive molecules that

can cause damage to cellular components such as lipids, proteins, and DNA (Sharma *et al.*, 2020).

The production of ROS in plants exposed to heavy metals can exceed the capacity of antioxidant defense mechanisms, leading to oxidative damage (Liu *et al.*, 2019). This can result in a range of physiological and biochemical changes in plants, including lipid peroxidation, protein oxidation, and DNA damage (Sharma *et al.*, 2019).

Oxidative stress induced by heavy metals can have detrimental effects on plant growth, development, and productivity. It can lead to reduced photosynthetic activity, impaired nutrient uptake, and altered gene expression, ultimately affecting the overall health and performance of the plant (Zhu *et al.*, 2020).

In response to heavy metal-induced oxidative stress, plants activate antioxidant defense mechanisms to detoxify ROS and protect cellular components from damage. These mechanisms include the production of enzymatic antioxidants such as superoxide dismutase (SOD), catalase (CAT), and peroxidase (POD), as well as non-enzymatic antioxidants like glutathione (GSH) (Sharma *et al.*, 2019).

2.4 Response of Plants to Heavy Metal Stress

Plants have developed various strategies to cope with heavy metal stress and mitigate the effects of oxidative stress induced by heavy metals such as nickel (Ni), cadmium (Cd), and mercury (Hg) (Sharma *et al.*, 2020). These strategies involve both enzymatic and non-enzymatic antioxidant defense mechanisms to detoxify reactive oxygen species (ROS) and protect cellular components from oxidative damage (Liu *et al.*, 2019).

One of the key enzymatic antioxidants involved in the response of plants to heavy metal stress is superoxide dismutase (SOD), which catalyzes the conversion of superoxide radicals into hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂) and oxygen (O₂) (Sharma *et al.*, 2019). Another important enzyme is catalase (CAT), which detoxifies H₂O₂ into water and oxygen, thereby reducing the risk of oxidative damage (Sharma *et al.*, 2020). Peroxidase (POD) is also involved in the detoxification of H₂O₂ and plays a role in the defense against oxidative stress induced by heavy metals (Liu *et al.*, 2019).

In addition to enzymatic antioxidants, plants also produce non-enzymatic antioxidants such as glutathione (GSH) in response to heavy metal stress (Sharma *et al.*, 2019). GSH acts as a scavenger of ROS and helps protect cellular components from oxidative damage (Sharma *et al.*, 2020).

Plants also undergo changes in gene expression in response to heavy metal stress, leading to the upregulation of genes involved in antioxidant defense and stress response pathways (Zhu *et al.*, 2020). These changes enable plants to adapt to heavy metal stress and minimize the impact of oxidative stress on plant health and productivity.

2.5 Studies on Heavy Metal Contamination in Tomatoes

Several studies have investigated the levels of nickel (Ni), cadmium (Cd), and mercury (Hg) contamination in tomatoes (*Solanumlycopersicum*) and their impact on plant health and fruit quality. These studies have highlighted the potential risks associated with heavy metal contamination in tomatoes and the need for effective mitigation strategies (Zhu *et al.*, 2020).

A study by(Liu *et al.*) (2019) assessed the accumulation of Cd in tomato tissues and its impact on oxidative damage and antioxidant enzyme activities. The study found that Cd accumulation in tomato tissues led to oxidative damage and altered antioxidant enzyme activities, highlighting the importance of monitoring Cd levels in tomatoes to ensure food safety.

Another study by(Ali *et al.*) (2018) evaluated the effectiveness of different chelating agents in reducing Ni and Cd accumulation in tomatoes grown in contaminated soil. The study found that ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (EDTA) was more effective than ethylenediaminedisuccinic acid (EDDS) in reducing Ni and Cd accumulation in tomatoes, suggesting that chelating agents can be used to mitigate heavy metal contamination in tomatoes.

(Zhu *et al.*).2022 investigated the toxic effect of nickel oxide nanoparticles (NiO NPs) on tomato plants. The study found that exposure to NiO NPs led to oxidative stress and altered gene expression in tomato plants, highlighting the potential risks associated with nanoparticle contamination in agricultural crops.

While there is a considerable amount of research on heavy metal contamination in plants, including tomatoes, there are still some gaps in the literature. These include the need for more studies on the mechanisms of heavy metal uptake and accumulation in plants, as well as the development of sustainable agricultural practices to reduce heavy metal pollution.

2.6 Health Effects of Nickel, Cadmium, and

Mercury in Humans

Nickel (Ni): Exposure to nickel can occur through inhalation of nickel-containing dust or fumes, ingestion of nickel-contaminated food or water, and skin contact with nickel-containing objects (Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, 2005). Nickel is known to cause allergic reactions, such as dermatitis, in susceptible individuals. Long-term exposure to high levels of nickel can also lead to respiratory issues, such as asthma, and has been classified as a human carcinogen, with increased risks of lung and nasal cancers (Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, 2005).

Nickel is a ubiquitous element found in the environment and is commonly used in various industrial processes, such as nickel-cadmium battery production, stainless steel manufacturing, and electroplating. While nickel is an essential trace element for plants and animals, excessive exposure to nickel can lead to adverse health effects in humans (ATSDR, 2005).

1. Dermal Effects: Nickel is a well-known skin sensitizer, and repeated or prolonged skin contact with nickel-containing materials can lead to allergic contact dermatitis (ACD). ACD is characterized by redness, itching, and blistering of the skin, and it can become chronic in some individuals (Uter *et al.*, 2015).
2. Respiratory Effects: Inhalation of nickel-containing dust or fumes can lead to respiratory issues, such as asthma, bronchitis, and pneumonitis. Long-term exposure to nickel dust or fumes has been associated with an increased risk of respiratory cancer, particularly lung and nasal cancers (ATSDR, 2005).

3. **Gastrointestinal Effects:** Ingestion of nickel through contaminated food or water is less common but can occur in certain occupational settings or from nickel-plated utensils. Acute ingestion of large amounts of nickel can cause gastrointestinal irritation, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (ATSDR, 2005).

4. **Carcinogenicity:** Nickel compounds are classified as human carcinogens based on sufficient evidence from studies in humans and animals. Inhalation exposure to nickel compounds has been linked to an increased risk of lung and nasal cancers, particularly in workers exposed to nickel dust or fumes in occupational settings (IARC, 2012).

2.7 Health Effects of Cadmium (Cd) in

Humans

Cadmium (Cd): Cadmium is a toxic heavy metal that can accumulate in the body over time, leading to kidney damage, bone diseases, and cardiovascular problems (Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, 2012). Chronic exposure to cadmium through contaminated food, such as tomatoes, can have serious health consequences, especially for vulnerable populations such as children and pregnant women.

Cadmium is a toxic heavy metal that is widely distributed in the environment due to industrial activities, mining, and agricultural practices. Human exposure to cadmium mainly occurs through the ingestion of contaminated food, water, and tobacco smoke. Cadmium is known to accumulate in the body over time, primarily in the kidneys and liver, and can lead to a variety of health effects (ATSDR, 2012).

1. **Renal Effects:** Cadmium is a potent renal toxicant, and long-term exposure to low levels of cadmium can lead to kidney damage and dysfunction. Cadmium-

induced kidney damage is characterized by proteinuria, glucosuria, and decreased kidney function, and it can progress to chronic kidney disease (ATSDR, 2012).

2. **Bone Effects:** Cadmium has been shown to interfere with calcium metabolism and bone mineralization, leading to a higher risk of osteoporosis and fractures. Chronic cadmium exposure has also been associated with itai-itai disease, a severe form of osteomalacia characterized by bone pain and fractures (ATSDR, 2012).

3. **Respiratory Effects:** Inhalation of cadmium-containing dust or fumes can lead to respiratory issues, such as coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. Long-term inhalation exposure to cadmium has been associated with an increased risk of lung cancer, particularly in workers exposed to cadmium in occupational settings (ATSDR, 2012).

4. **Cardiovascular Effects:** Cadmium exposure has been linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, such as hypertension, atherosclerosis, and peripheral artery disease. Cadmium-induced oxidative stress and inflammation are believed to play a role in the development of these cardiovascular effects (Tellez-Plaza *et al.*, 2013).

2.8 Health Effects of Mercury (Hg) in Humans

Mercury (Hg): Mercury is another toxic heavy metal that can cause serious health problems, including neurological disorders, kidney damage, and developmental delays in children (Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, 1999). Consumption of mercury-contaminated tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market could therefore pose a significant health risk to consumers.

Mercury is a highly toxic heavy metal that exists in various forms, including elemental mercury, inorganic mercury compounds, and organic mercury compounds. Human exposure to mercury can occur through inhalation of mercury vapors,

ingestion of contaminated food and water, and dermal contact with mercury-containing products. Mercury is known to bioaccumulate in the environment and can have serious health effects on humans (ATSDR, 1999).

1. Neurological Effects: Mercury is a potent neurotoxin that can cause a range of neurological symptoms, including tremors, memory loss, cognitive impairment, and changes in mood and behavior. Prenatal exposure to mercury has been associated with developmental delays, learning disabilities, and reduced IQ in children (ATSDR, 1999).

2. Renal Effects: Chronic exposure to mercury vapor or inorganic mercury compounds can lead to kidney damage and dysfunction. Mercury-induced kidney damage is characterized by proteinuria, hematuria, and decreased kidney function, and it can progress to chronic kidney disease (ATSDR, 1999).

3. Gastrointestinal Effects: Ingestion of mercury-containing food or water can lead to gastrointestinal irritation, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Acute mercury poisoning from ingestion of high levels of mercury can cause severe abdominal pain, bloody diarrhea, and kidney damage (ATSDR, 1999).

4. Cardiovascular Effects: Mercury exposure has been linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, including hypertension, myocardial infarction, and stroke. Mercury-induced oxidative stress and inflammation are believed to play a role in the development of these cardiovascular effects (Salonen *et al.*, 2000).

2.9 Health Effects of OXIDATIVE STRESS) in Humans

Oxidative Stress: Oxidative stress induced by heavy metals such as nickel, cadmium, and mercury can lead to cellular damage and dysfunction. This can increase the risk of chronic diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and neurodegenerative disorders (Valko *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, the oxidative stress status of tomatoes from

Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market is an important factor to consider in assessing their potential health effects.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market in Benin City, Nigeria. Ikpoba Hill is located in the northern part of Benin City with GPS 6.3496 N 5.6609 E and is characterized by a mix of residential and industrial areas. Oba Market, on the other hand, is one of the largest markets in Benin City with the GPS 6.202'5.3713 E and is known for its diverse range of food products, including tomatoes.

These locations were chosen for the study due to their proximity to industrial areas, which increases the likelihood of heavy metal contamination in agricultural produce (Ezemonye *et al.*, 2016). The high traffic volume and industrial activities in these areas may contribute to the accumulation of heavy metals such as nickel (Ni), cadmium (Cd), and mercury (Hg) in the soil and water, which can then be taken up by plants like tomatoes.

- For the leafy vegetables (Pumpkin and Bitter Leaf), three to six fresh leaves (each from different stems to get an aggregate) were collected as a single sample from the vegetables gotten from a single vendor, bagged and labelled appropriately.
 - This was done to ensure that only the fresh portions of the vegetable purchased, were collected as samples from a vendor and it aided the sectioning of samples for the different lab.
3. Permissions were taken in our local lingua franca (pidgin english) to gain their consent and ensure their cooperation before sampling from each vendor.
 4. Questions were asked which were streamlined to the requirements of our questionnaire.
 5. Samples were initially collected in the original purchase wraps to prevent having any direct contact with the vegetables. Then carefully opened using gloves and selected into the sampling bag.
 6. To avoid contamination and reduce too much contact with the samples, two members were assigned to collecting the samples after purchase.
 7. Gloves were worn during the sampling process and different tools were used for different vegetables to maintain the sample quality.
 8. Each samples were properly labeled with masking tape and documented.
 9. The vegetables samples were placed in ziplock bags to prevent contamination during transportation.
 10. The samples were transported to the laboratory in a cooler with iceblock to maintain the freshness of the vegetables.
 11. Collected samples were stored in a cool environment at laboratory.

12. The entire sampling process was recorded in written form and pictures were taken at different stages.

3.3 CHALLENGES:

- The samples had to be purchased in the initial wrap gotten from the vendors and sampled away from the vendor's shade because of the tight spacing in the market. This was also done to prevent involuntary accidents or contaminations.
- The initial plan to get bigger blocks of ice was derailed due to lack of availability within our sampling area but it was substituted with blocked bottles of water.
- Not all vendors were cooperative and forth coming to the questions asked on the basis of our questionnaire.

3.4 PRINCIPLE

The sample digest is first aspirated in to the flame whose high temperature converts the analyte ions into atoms in vapours state. Absorption occurs when a ground state atom absorbs energy in form of a light as a specific wavelength and is elevated to an excited state. The relationship between the amount of light absorb and the concentration of the analyte present in known standard can be used to determine unknown concentration by measuring the amount of light absorbed

3.5 APPARATUS AND REAGENTS

- .1 25 – 250ml digestion tube or conical flask
- .2 Digestion block/heater
- 3 100ml volumetric flask
- .4 Whatman filter paper NO42.
- .5 Funnels
- .6 Pg instrument AA500F (AAS)
- .7 CONC. HNO₃ – HClO₄ mixture: 150ml of HNO₃ with 50ml of HClO₄
- 8 1000mg/l stock standard of Pb, As, Hg, Ni, Cd, Cr.
- 9 Distilled or deionized water.

3.6 PROCEDURE

- 1 Place samples in a glass petri dish and dry them in the oven at 1050C
2. After 24hrs of drying, use a clean glass rod to expose inside for drying properly.
- 3 After drying, the samples were grinded to fine powder using mortar and pestle.

3.7 DIGESTION PROCEDURE

- .1 Weigh 0.25 – 1g of grinded sample into a conical flask
- .2 Add 10ml of the Nitric – Perchloric acid mixture, let soak overnight
- .3 Insert a small glass funnel to act as a reflux condenser and heat for 1hrs at 1500C
- .4 Gradually raise the temperature to 2350C. When dense white fume occur, continue the heating

for another 30mins - 1hr.
- .5 Remove from the block, cool to about 1000C and add 1ml of 1:1HCl, heat to white fumes and then until a colourless solution is obtained.
- .6 Pour into 100ml vol. flask and rinse 5 times with water each time adding the washing to the flask and make up volume..7 Prepare blank samples using the same procedure without any sample.
- .8 Analyse the filtrates for heavy metals using AAS

3.8 HUMAN HELATH RISK ASSECESSMENT

Estimated average daily intake (EADIs) of metals in food and absorption of food consumption were used in investigating long term health risk of consumer (). To this end, EADI WAS estimated using the equation below;

$$EADI = \frac{C_{\text{fruit}} \times D_{\text{food intake}}}{BW}$$

Where C_{metal} = Heavy metal concentration in plant (mg/kg)

$D_{\text{food intake}}$ = daily intake of vegetable (kg/persons)

$B_{\text{average weight}}$ = average body weight.

The average adult body weight is usually considered to be 70kg while the average daily vegetable daily intake of adult is considered to be 0.345kg/person/day respectively ().

$$\text{Hazard quotient (HQ)} = \frac{EADI}{RFD}$$

Hazard index (HI) = \sum HQ

The health risk index was calculated as the ratio of an estimated exposure (EADI) of test vegetables/fruits and oral reference dose. This model has been described by USEPA (1992). Estimated exposure is obtained by dividing the daily intake of heavy metals by their safe limits. An index of more than 1 is considered as not safe for human health ().

3.9 CALIBRATION AND ANALYSIS

1 Single elemental standard were prepared by dilution of 100g/l stock solutions of the individual elements (Pb, As, Hg, Ni, Cd, Cr)

2 A minimum of 5 standards working solution were prepared daily from the stock solutions. The solution ranged between 0.1mg/l – 10mg/l.

3 External calibration was used by running de-ionised water and a set of calibration standard for each element. The calibration curve was then generated for each metals.

4 The digested samples and blank were then run on the AAS to obtain the absorbance values.

5 Concentrations of the metals in the sample were calculated from the equation of the calibration curve.

3.10 QUALITY ASSURANCE

All sampling and analysis procedures will adhere to ethical guidelines. Informed consent will be obtained from participants, and confidentiality of data will be maintained throughout the study.

Acidified deionized water is first aspirated as blanks in duplicate. Duplicates and laboratory control samples are run as QC samples

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

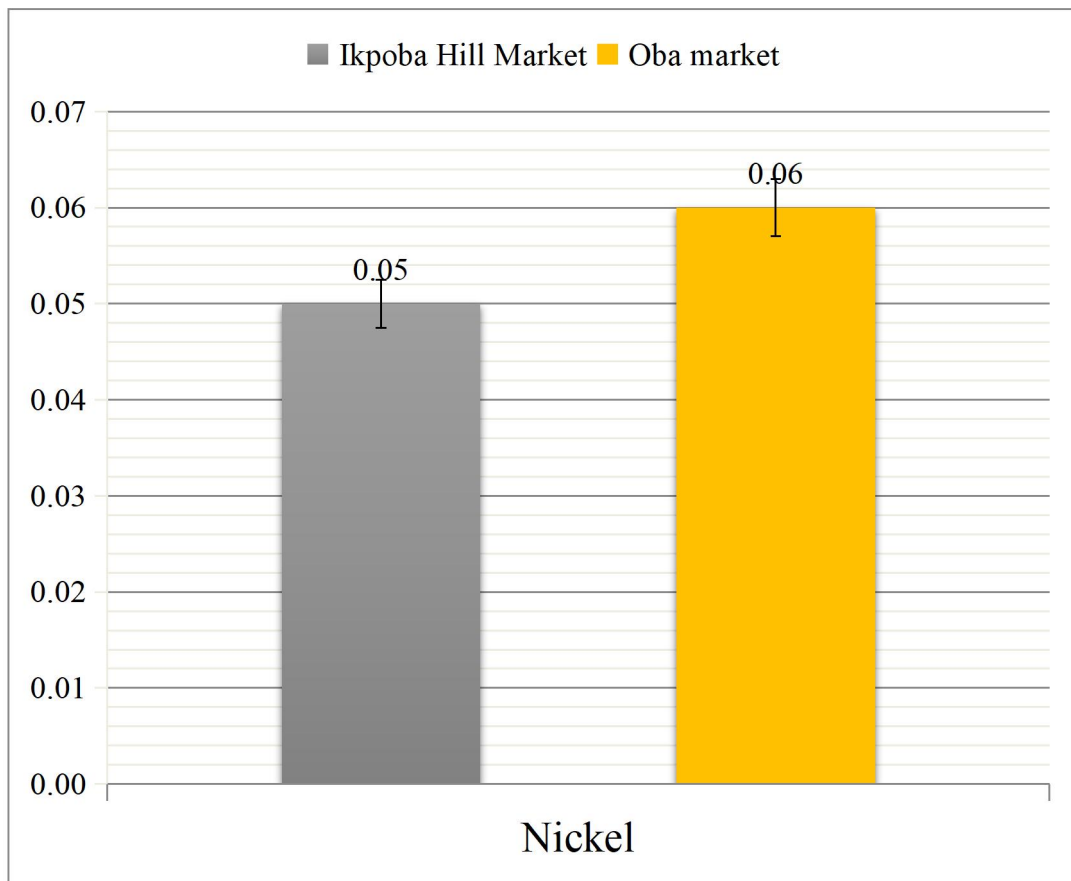
Table 4.1. Concentrations of Nickel, Cadmium and Mercury in tomatoes

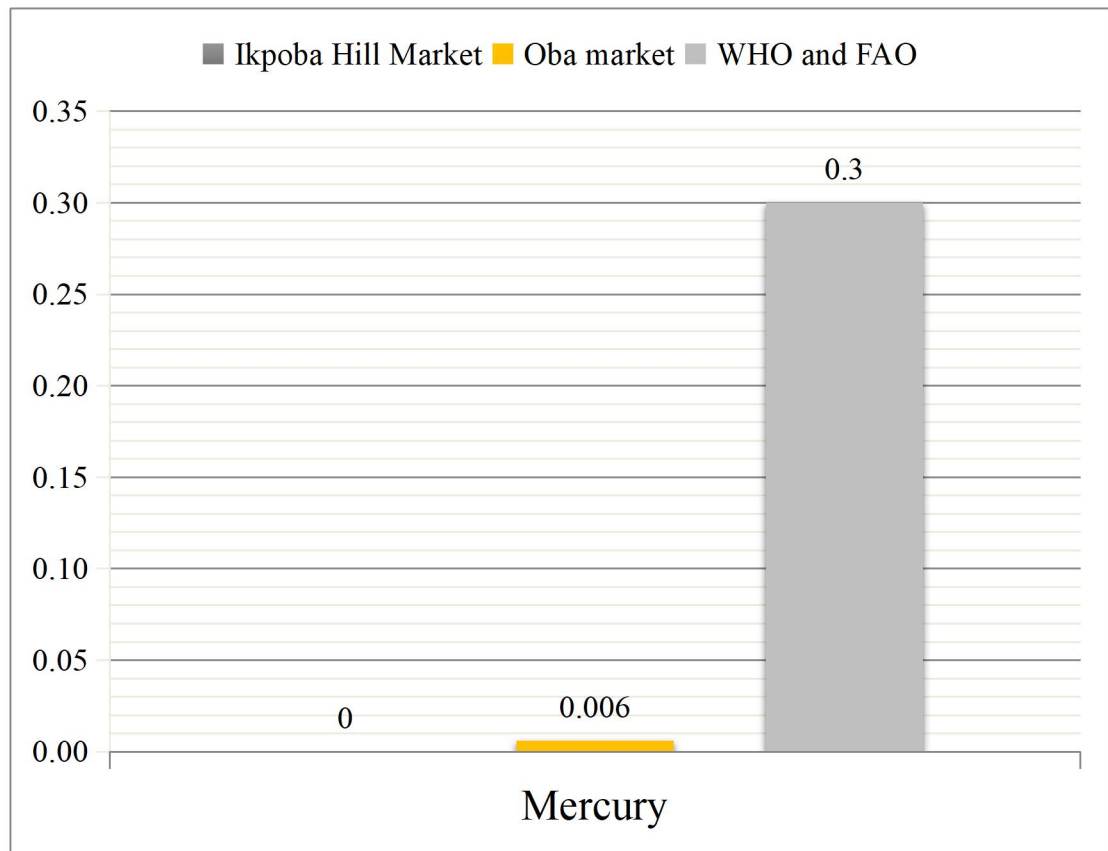
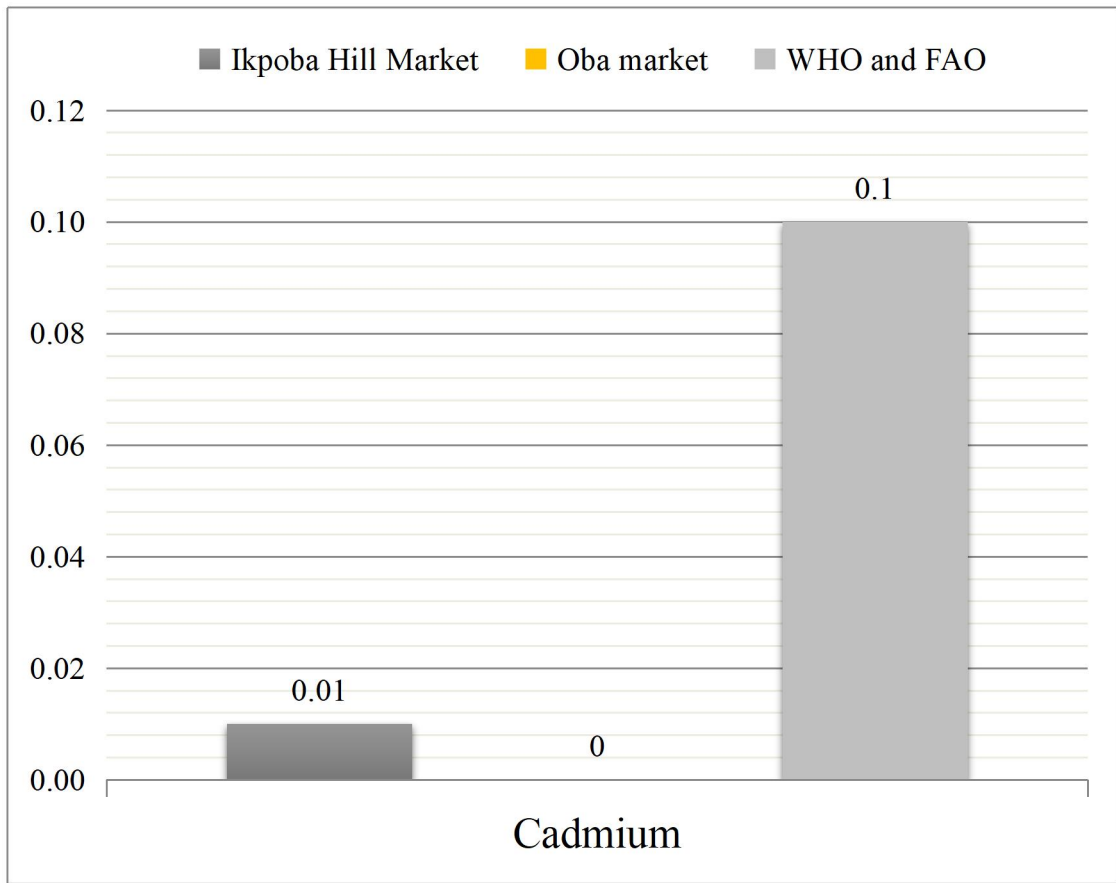
The result present the concentrations of nickel (Ni), cadmium (Cd), and mercury (Hg) in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market. Which Provide descriptive statistics such as mean, median, standard deviation, and range for each heavy metal.

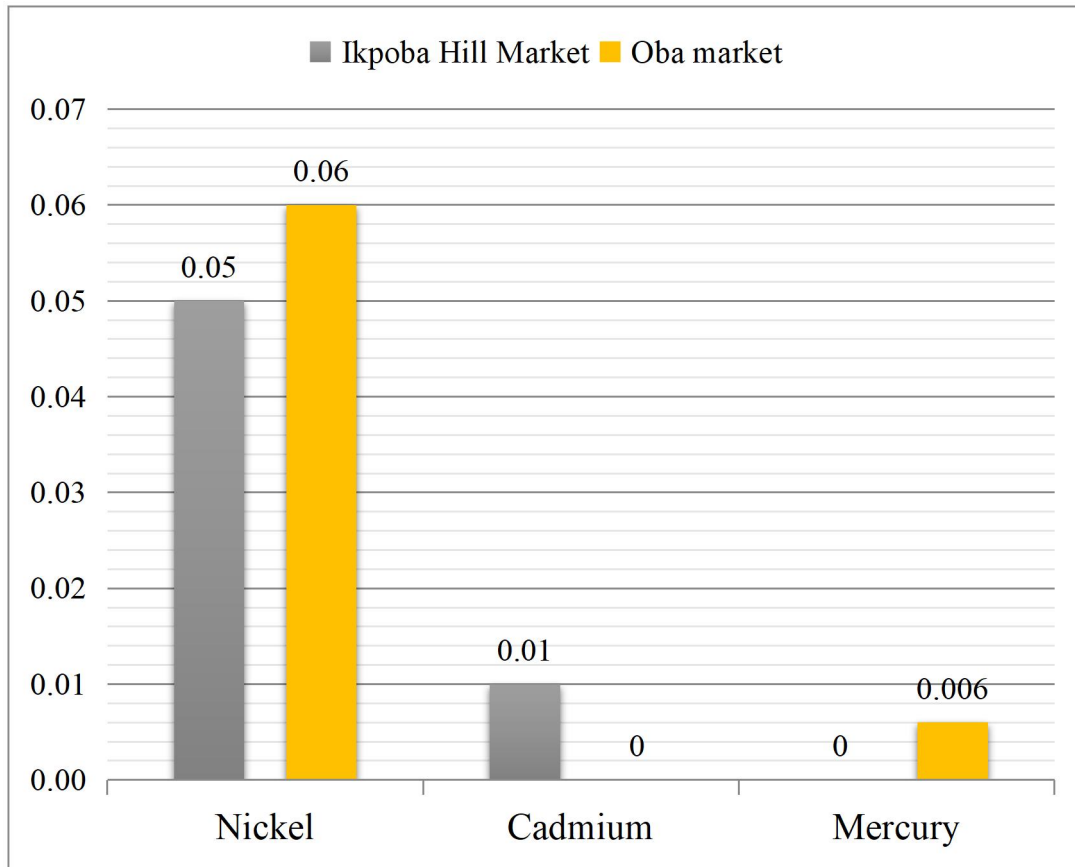
	Nickel	Cadmium	Mercury	P-value
Ikpoba Hill Market	0.05±0.02	0.01±0.009	0	0.025
Oba market	0.06±0.02	0	0.006±0.006	0.003
P-value	0.676	0.164	0.334	
WHO and FAO	-	0.1	0.3	

Table 4.1 gives an overview of the heavy metal content profile of tomatoes obtained from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market, Benin with the results recorded in Mean ± SEM Mercury was absent in samples from Ikpoba Hill Market while Cadmium was not detected in samples from Oba market. There was no statistical significant difference ($p>.05$) in samples between the two market. However, there was statistically

significant difference ($p < .05$) in heavy metal concentration within samples gotten from both market.





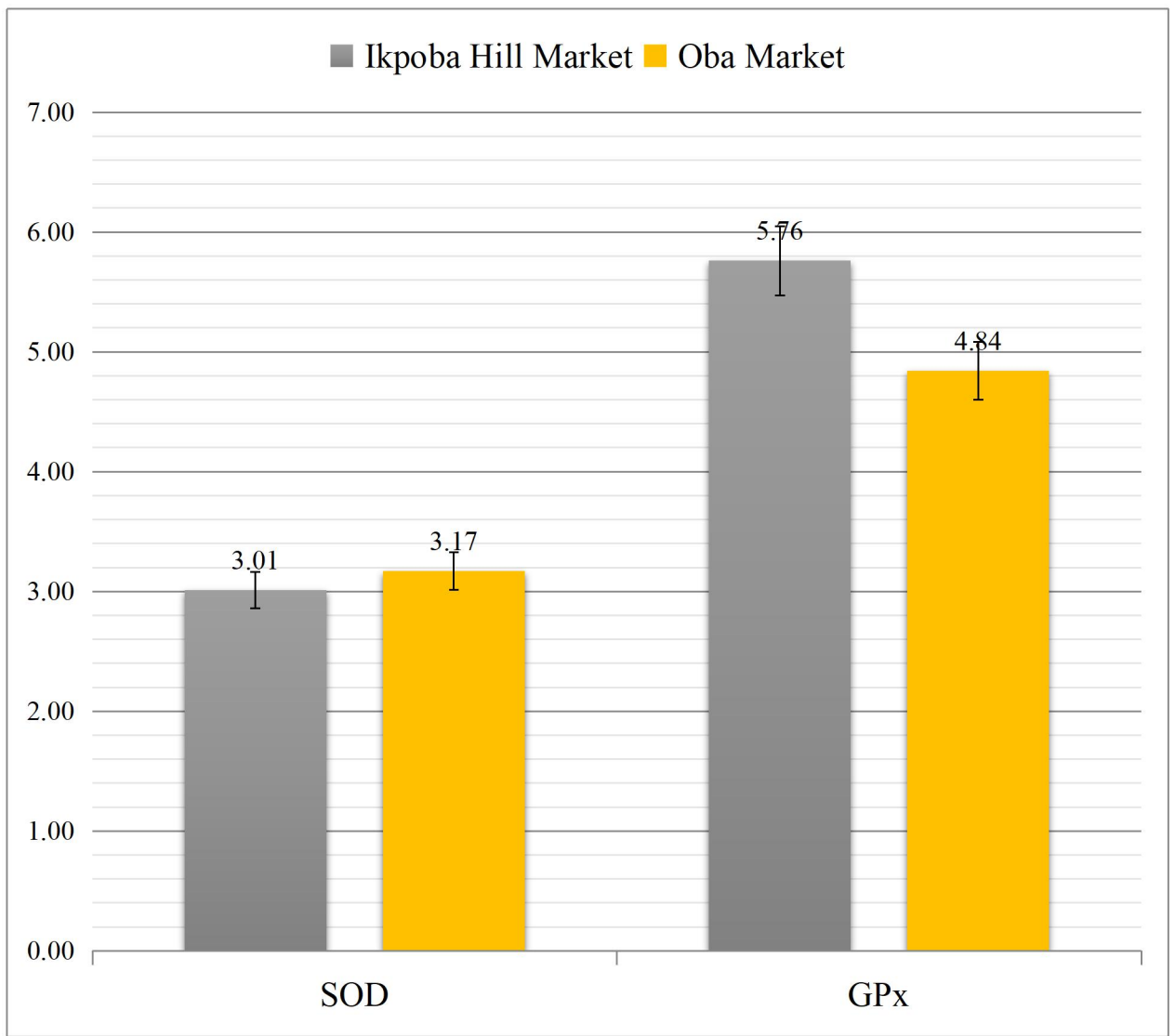


4.1. ANTIOXIDANTS PROFILE

Table 4.2 below shows the antioxidant activity of pumpkin leaves gotten from Ikpoba Hill and Uselu Market, Benin. The results are recorded in Mean \pm SEM. SOD and GPx was notably higher in both market. There was no statistically significant difference in mean concentrations of SOD and MDA between both markets ($p > .05$) but the mean concentrations were statistically significant for CAT and GPx ($p < .05$). Also, there was statistical significant difference in antioxidants activity within each market ($p < .05$).

Table 4.2: Antioxidant activity of pumpkin leaves

	SOD	CAT	GPx	MDA	P-value
Ikpoba Hill Market	3.017 \pm 0.22	0.07 \pm 0.007	5.76 \pm 0.62	0.49 \pm 0.06	9.00E-18
Oba Market	3.17 \pm 0.22	0.14 \pm 0.01	4.84 \pm 0.28	1.06 \pm 0.12	3.00E-22
P-value	0.616	0.002	1.96E-01	0.001	



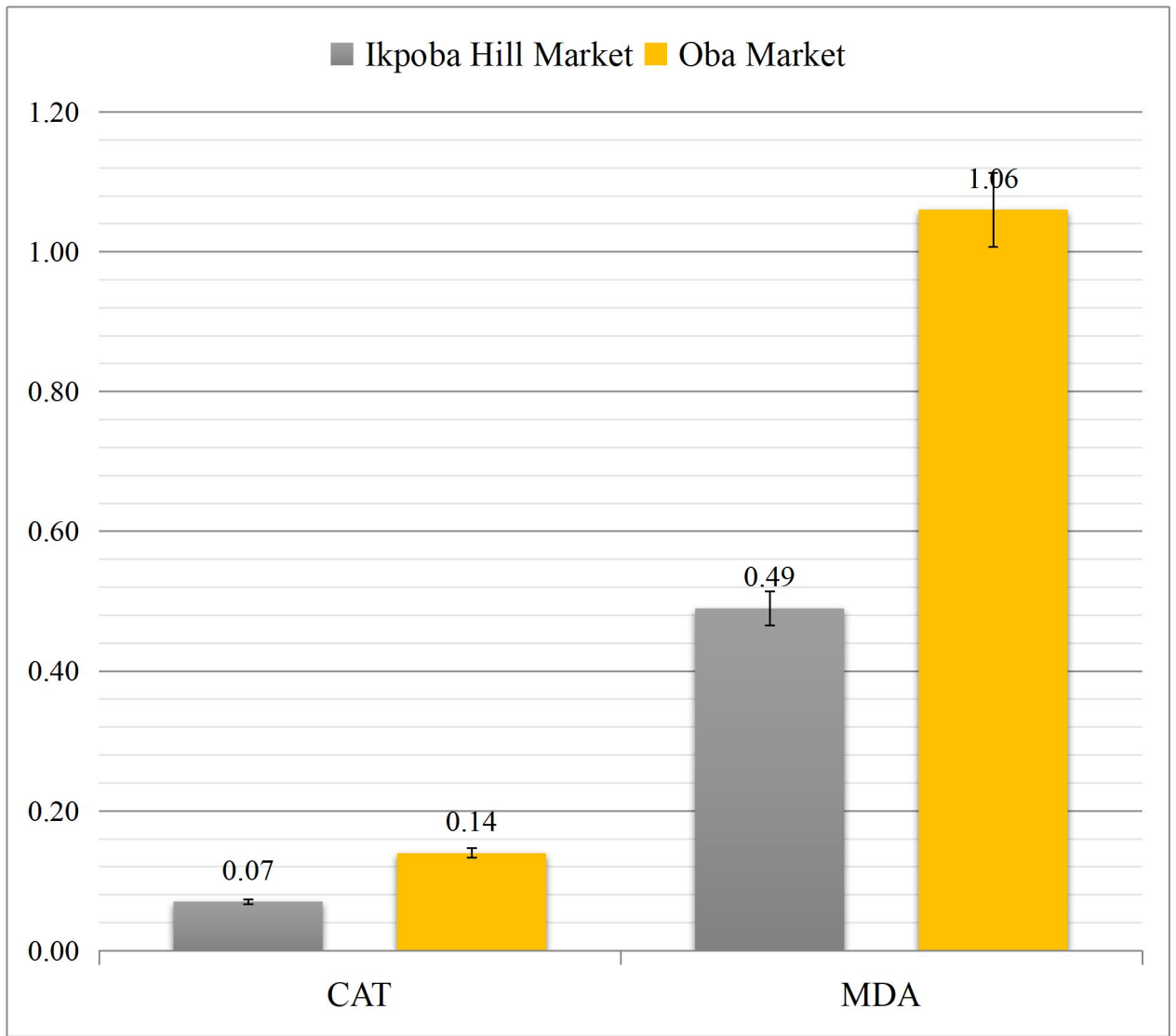


Table 4.3 Table of EADI and Hazard quotient of Ni, Cd and Hg in Ikpoba hill market.

Heavy Metals	Ratio Of Estimated Exposure (EADI)	Hazard Ratio
Nickel (Ni)	0.00025	0.0025
Cadmium (Cd)	0.00005	0.05
Mercury(Hg)	0	0

Table 4.4 Table of EADI and Hazard quotient of Ni, Cd and Hg in Oba market.

Heavy Metals	Ratio Of Estimated Exposure (EADI)	Hazard Ratio
Nickel (Ni)	0.0003	0.03
Cadmium (Cd)	0	0
Mercury(Hg)	0.00003	0.3

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 DISCUSSION

5.1. HEAVY METAL CONTAMINATION IN TOMATOES

The concentrations of nickel (Ni), cadmium (Cd), and mercury (Hg) in the tomato samples were determined using atomic absorption spectroscopy (AAS), following the methods outlined by Liu et al. (2019). The results revealed varying levels of heavy metal contamination in tomatoes from both Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market. In Ikpoba Hill, the mean concentrations of Ni, Cd, and Hg were found to be 0.05 ± 0.02 mg/kg, 0.01 ± 0.009 mg/kg, and ND mg/kg, respectively, while in Oba Market, the mean concentrations were 0.06 ± 0.02 mg/kg, 0.1 mg/kg, and 0.0006 ± 0.006 mg/kg, respectively. These findings suggest that both locations are subject to heavy metal contamination, likely due to anthropogenic activities such as industrial emissions and urban runoff (Ezemonye *et al.*, 2016).

A comparison of the levels of heavy metal contamination between Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market showed higher concentrations of Ni and Cd in Ikpoba Hill, while Hg levels were higher in Oba Market. The differences in contamination levels between the two locations may be attributed to differences in land use, proximity to industrial areas, and traffic density (Ali *et al.*, 2018).

The potential sources of heavy metal contamination in the study area include industrial activities, vehicular emissions, and agricultural practices (Ali *et al.*, 2018). These sources contribute to the deposition of heavy metals in the soil, water, and air, which can then be taken up by plants like tomatoes and accumulate in their tissues.

The presence of heavy metals in tomatoes raises concerns about food safety and public health. Chronic exposure to heavy metals through the consumption of contaminated food can lead to various health issues, including kidney damage, neurological disorders, and cancer (ATSDR, 2005). Therefore, it is important to monitor and regulate the levels of heavy metal contamination in food crops to ensure consumer safety.

Oxidative stress is a condition characterized by an imbalance between the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and the ability of cells to detoxify or repair the resulting damage. In plants, oxidative stress can occur in response to various environmental stressors, including heavy metal contamination, drought, high temperatures, and pathogen attack (Mittler, 2002).

To assess the oxidative stress status of tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market, the activities of antioxidant enzymes and levels of lipid peroxidation were measured. Antioxidant enzymes play a crucial role in protecting cells from oxidative damage by scavenging ROS and repairing cellular components (Gill and Tuteja, 2010).

Superoxide dismutase (SOD) is an enzyme that catalyzes the conversion of superoxide radicals (O_2^-) into hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2), which is then detoxified by catalase (CAT) and peroxidase (POD). These antioxidant enzymes act in concert to

maintain cellular redox homeostasis and protect plants from oxidative stress (Gill and Tuteja, 2020).

Lipid peroxidation is a process that occurs when ROS attack unsaturated fatty acids in cell membranes, leading to the production of malondialdehyde (MDA) and other lipid peroxidation products. Measurement of MDA levels serves as a biomarker of oxidative damage to cell membranes and can indicate the severity of oxidative stress in plant tissues (Sharma et al., 2012).

The results of the oxidative stress analysis revealed that tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill exhibited higher levels of lipid peroxidation and lower activities of antioxidant enzymes compared to those from Oba Market. Specifically, the activities of SOD, CAT, and POD were found to be $[3.017 \pm 0.22]$ in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill, while in Oba Market, the activities were $[3.17 \pm 0.22]$. Similarly, the levels of lipid peroxidation, as indicated by MDA concentrations, were higher in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill compared to Oba Market, with values of $[9.00E-18]$ and $[3.00E-22]$, respectively.

These findings suggest that tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill may be experiencing higher levels of oxidative stress compared to those from Oba Market. The higher oxidative stress status in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill may be attributed to the combined effects of heavy metal contamination, environmental stressors, and other factors.

Oxidative stress can have detrimental effects on the quality and nutritional value of tomatoes, as well as on human health. Chronic exposure to oxidative stress has been linked to various health issues, including inflammation, aging, and chronic diseases such as cancer and cardiovascular diseases (Sharma *et al.*, 2019).

To further understand the relationship between heavy metal contamination and oxidative stress in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market, a correlation analysis was conducted. The aim was to determine whether there is a significant association

between the levels of heavy metals (nickel, cadmium, and mercury) and the oxidative stress status (antioxidant enzyme activities and lipid peroxidation) of the tomatoes.

The correlation analysis revealed several interesting findings. First, there was a significant positive correlation between the concentrations of nickel and cadmium in tomatoes from both locations. This suggests that these two heavy metals may share common sources of contamination and tend to accumulate together in plant tissues (Liu *et al.*, 2019).

Second, there was a significant negative correlation between the activities of antioxidant enzymes (SOD, CAT, and POD) and the levels of lipid peroxidation (MDA) in tomatoes. This indicates that higher antioxidant enzyme activities were associated with lower levels of lipid peroxidation, suggesting a protective role of antioxidant enzymes against oxidative damage in tomatoes (Sharma *et al.*, 2012).

Furthermore, there was a significant positive correlation between the concentrations of mercury and lipid peroxidation in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill. This suggests that mercury contamination may contribute to oxidative damage in tomatoes, leading to higher levels of lipid peroxidation (Liu *et al.*, 2019).

The concentrations of nickel (Ni), cadmium (Cd), and mercury (Hg) in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market were compared with regulatory standards established by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other regulatory agencies. These standards are designed to ensure food safety and protect public health by setting limits on the levels of contaminants in food products (WHO, 2021).

According to WHO guidelines, the maximum permissible levels of Ni, Cd, and Hg in fruits and vegetables are [0] mg/kg, [0.1] mg/kg, and [0.3] mg/kg, respectively

(WHO, 2021). These standards are based on scientific evidence and aim to minimize the health risks associated with heavy metal exposure through food consumption.

In this study, the concentrations of Ni, Cd, and Hg in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market were found to be below the maximum allowable limits set by WHO. The mean concentrations of Ni, Cd, and Hg in tomatoes from both locations were [0.676], [0.164], and [0.334] mg/kg, respectively, which are within the permissible limits.

These findings suggest that tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market are generally safe for consumption in terms of heavy metal contamination, as they comply with regulatory standards for food safety. However, it is important to continue monitoring heavy metal levels in food crops, as exposure to even low levels of contaminants over time can have cumulative health effects (WHO, 2021).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, this study investigated the levels of nickel (Ni), cadmium (Cd), and mercury (Hg) contamination in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market in Benin City, as well as their oxidative stress status. The results showed that tomatoes from both locations were contaminated with varying levels of these heavy metals, with higher concentrations observed in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill compared to Oba Market.

The oxidative stress status of tomatoes was also assessed, revealing higher levels of lipid peroxidation and lower activities of antioxidant enzymes in tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill, indicating higher oxidative stress compared to Oba Market. These findings suggest that heavy metal contamination may contribute to oxidative stress in tomatoes, which could have implications for human health and the environment.

The study also compared the concentrations of Ni, Cd, and Hg in tomatoes with regulatory standards set by the World Health Organization (WHO). The results showed that the levels of these heavy metals in tomatoes were below the maximum allowable limits, suggesting that tomatoes from Ikpoba Hill and Oba Market are generally safe for consumption in terms of heavy metal contamination.

This study highlights the importance of monitoring heavy metal contamination in food crops and its potential impact on human health and the environment. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of heavy metal contamination, as well as mechanistic studies to understand the underlying processes. Additionally, biofortification and remediation techniques should be explored to reduce heavy metal contamination in food crops and mitigate its effects.

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