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# A correlation study between dengue incidence and climatological factors in the Philippines

**Original Research  
Article**

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## Abstract

Dengue is a viral mosquito-borne infection transmitted primarily by the *Aedes* mosquitoes. It is one of the several emerging tropical diseases which progressively spread geographically to virtually all tropical countries like the Philippines. Recent climate changes related to global warming have increased the potential risk of dengue outbreaks in the world. In this paper, we study and investigate temperature and precipitation as climatological factors affecting dengue incidence in the Philippines from the year 2015 to 2018. Monthly dengue cases and climate data were gathered for the said study period. A correlation and wavelet coherence analyses were performed to determine a relationship between dengue incidence and climatological factors in the Philippines. Results show that the amount of rainfall is strongly correlated to the increase of dengue cases in the country as compared to the temperature. Evidence shows that dengue incidence in the Philippines mostly occur during the rainy season. Thus, intensified surveillance and control of mosquitoes during the rainy season are recommended.

*Keywords: dengue incidence, climatological factors, correlation analysis, wavelet coherence analysis*  
2020 Mathematics Subject Classification: 05C35

## 1 Introduction

Throughout human history, infectious diseases have caused debilitation and premature death to large portions of the human population, leading to serious social-economic concerns (1). One of the most important infectious diseases is dengue, a major international public health concern with more than 55% of the world population at risk of acquiring the infection (10). Dengue is a viral mosquito-borne infection transmitted by the *Aedes* mosquitoes (8)–(16). It is one of the several emerging tropical diseases which progressively spread geographically to virtually all tropical countries, like the

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Philippines (13). It is transmitted primarily by the bite of infected female mosquitoes *Aedes aegypti*, but it also has been associated with other species such as *Ae. albopictus*, *Ae. polynesiensis*, and *Ae. scutellaris* (15).

Dengue transmission requires four necessary conditions: susceptible humans, abundant vector, virus introduction, and conducive environment, like climate. Climate factors such as temperature, rainfall, and humidity influence the life stages of female adult *Aedes* mosquitoes (2),(5),(7),(17),(25). In particular, the temperature has a strong influence on dengue transmission and the *Aedes* mosquito population (5),(17). In addition, rainfall provides plenty of breeding sites for mosquito vectors such as puddles, while humidity affects the adult mosquitoes' survival and biting frequency (12). The amount of rainfall may affect the larval population size (25), and the rainfall pattern has a certain effect on the larval density (11). Climate change impact factors are relevant to the mosquito population. Dengue incidences in Thailand, Taiwan, Singapore, and Brazil are associated with seasonal patterns in temperature, relative humidity, and rainfall (6),(23). Statistical approaches have revealed that these seasonal patterns play a significant role in dengue transmission (5),(18),(26). Therefore, the study about dengue incidence and climate factors in the Philippines from the year 2015 to 2018 was investigated to know the relationship of both variables.

## 2 Methodology

In this section, we present some relevant data informations needed in the study. These data include the weekly morbidity cases and monthly dengue incidence in the Philippines for the year 2015 to 2018, and the average monthly temperature and precipitation for the same study period.

### 2.1 Philippine epidemiological data

Dengue cases by morbidity week in the Philippines for the year 2015 to 2018 were gathered. Data for these periods were requested from the Epidemiology Bureau, Public Health Surveillance Division of the Department of Health, Philippines (9). The information was collected from the Philippine Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response System (PIDSRS) National Database. For instance, Figure 1 (a) depicts the reported dengue cases by morbidity week in the Philippines for the year 2015 to 2018 according to the data given in (9),(21),(22). The graph shows a decreasing trend of reported dengue cases during the first 16 weeks. Observe that for the four years, data show increasing pattern of dengue cases from the second week (around week 16), attaining a peak on the third quarter (around week 38), and decreasing towards the end of the year. Meanwhile, Figure 1 (b) shows the annual distribution of dengue cases in the Philippines for the same study period. Dengue cases decreased from 198,273 cases in 2015 to 188,944 cases in 2016. The lowest number of dengue cases among the study period was recorded around the year 2017 with 148,480 cases, then gradually increases towards 2018 with 184,198 cases.

### 2.2 Philippine climatological data

Philippine climatological data for the same study period were next gathered from the PAG-ASA (20). These data are archives of weather-related information collected from the 10 PAG-ASA Doppler radar stations and 44 PAG-ASA field offices all over the Philippines. These data are disseminated in various forms of media including on its official website. They are quality controlled and then archived in electronic databases. These archived datasets are made machine-readable to maximize their potential use, which also made them vulnerable for data mishandling, abuse, and exploitation. Figure 2 shows the graph of the average monthly temperature and precipitation for the year 2015 to 2018 based on the Philippine climatological data provided by (20). The figure shows that the

highest monthly average temperature recorded within the study period was  $29.37^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the 20th week of 2016 around the month of May, which is the second hottest month of the year after April, followed by  $29.02^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the same week and the same month of 2018. Meanwhile, the lowest monthly average temperature recorded was  $25.27^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the 2nd week of 2015 around the month of January. The same figure shows that between the study period from 2015 to 2018, the highest average monthly precipitation recorded was 426.905 mm in the 25th week of 2016 around the monsoon month of June, while the smallest average monthly precipitation was 39.9916 mm in the 12th week of 2015 around the summer month of March.

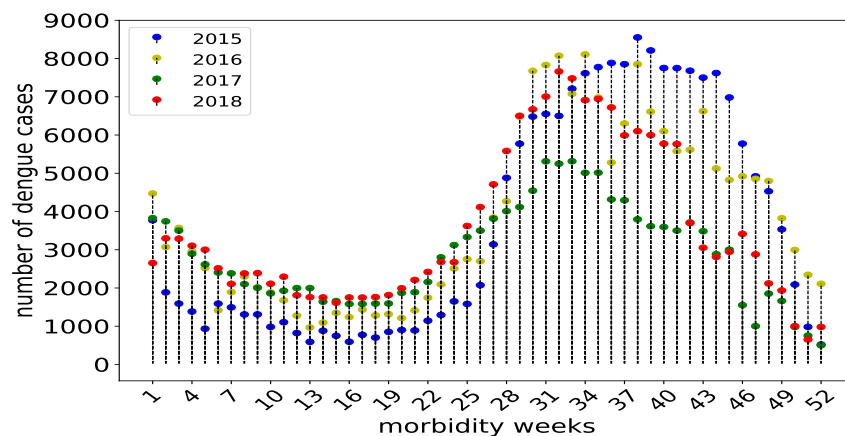


Figure 1 (a) Philippine dengue cases by morbidity week for the year 2015–2018.

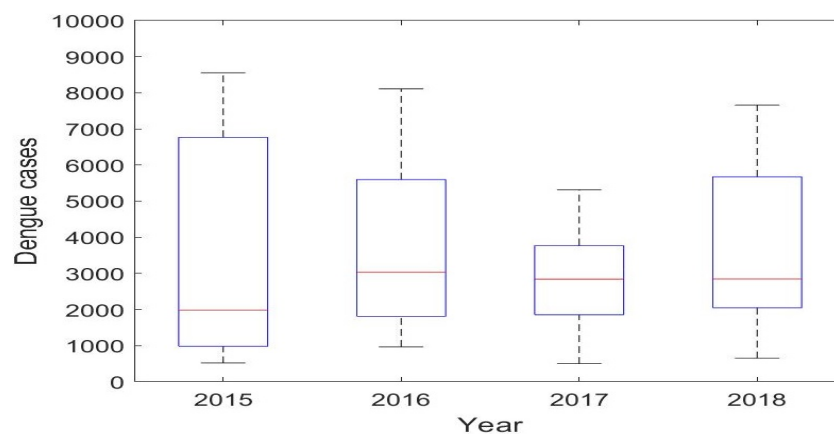


Figure 1 (b) Annual distribution of Philippine dengue cases for the year 2015–2018.

Figure 1: (a) The reported Philippine dengue cases by morbidity week for the year 2015–2018. (b) The annual distribution of Philippine dengue cases for the year 2015–2018.

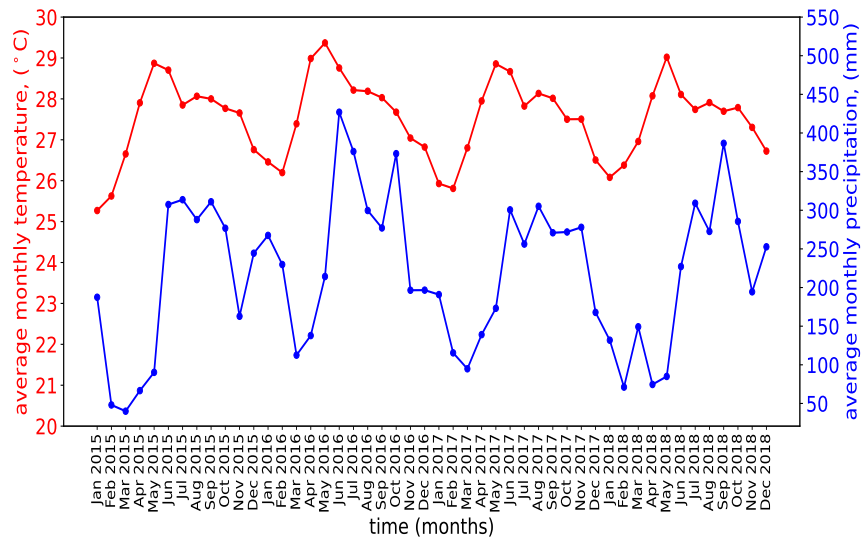


Figure 2: The Philippine climatological data: average monthly temperature (red) and precipitation (blue) for the year 2015–2018.

### 3 Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Seasonal variation of dengue incidence and climate factors

Dengue disease has risen in an alarming state in the Philippines in recent years. Data from the Philippines' Department of Health (DOH) reported an estimated suspected dengue cases of 84,085 in the country from January 1st to August 6th of 2016, which is 15.8% higher compared to the same period of last year in 2015 with only 72,627 reported cases, out of this, 372 resulted to death (12). This alarming rate is partly due to several factors such as climatic condition, rapid urbanization, increasing population, and poor mosquito surveillance and control system, which all contributed to the increasing number of dengue cases in the country (3), (9). In particular, Figure 3 shows the dynamics of the number of dengue cases in the Philippines for the year 2015–2018 against the temperature and precipitation, respectively. The figure shows that the number of dengue cases decreases on relatively lower and higher temperatures which coincides during the colder and summer months of January to May, and increases on moderate temperatures which is around June to November. This is due to the fact that during the colder and summer months, the number of disease-carrying mosquitoes decreases due to increasing mosquitoes mortality rate. The same figure shows that the number of dengue cases also decreases during the dry season which is around the months of January to May, and increases during the rainy season which is around the months of June to November. This is because at dry season, droughts are commonly experienced in the country resulting to the drying of the breeding grounds of mosquitoes, while the rainy season promotes mosquito breeding. Meanwhile, a decrease on the number of dengue cases in the country is observed during the later part of the year. The main reason to this is the fact that at this time period in the Philippines, temperatures usually drop due to northeast monsoons which are experienced in the country as a cool northeast wind characterized by below moderate temperatures with little rainfall. In effect, mosquitoes less multiply during this time period in the country resulting to the decrease of their population.

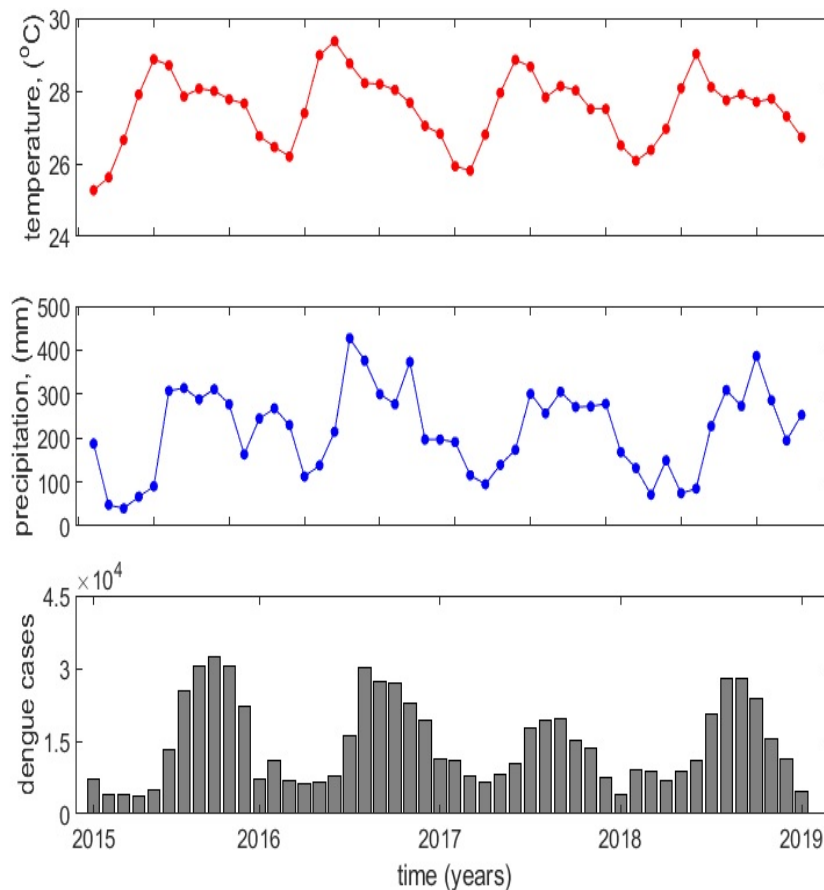


Figure 3: Seasonal variation of the monthly dengue cases and the monthly average temperature and precipitation in the Philippines for the year 2015–2018.

### 3.2 Correlation analysis

To investigate the result in Section 3.1, we compute the correlation between the monthly dengue cases and the monthly average temperature and precipitation for the year 2015–2018. This correlation is commonly used to measure the strength of an association between two variables. As the value of the correlation coefficient approaches 1, the relationship between the two variables becomes stronger, and the directions of the relationship are sign (+) and sign (–), which indicate a positive and negative relationship, respectively. We carry out three measures of non-parametric rank correlations: Spearman's  $\rho$ , Kendall's  $\tau$ , and Pearson's  $\mathbf{p}$  rank correlation coefficients using Matlab's built-in `spearmanr_rank`, `kendalltau_rank` and `pearsonp_rank_correlation` functions. Figure 4 shows the correlation matrix plot between the number of dengue cases and the temperature, and the number of dengue cases and precipitation, respectively, together with the Spearman (green), Kendall (red) and Pearson (black) correlation coefficients. The figure shows that both the monthly average temperature and precipitation, and the number of dengue cases exhibit positive relationship for the mentioned years. However, of the two climatological factors, the average monthly precipitation and the number of dengue cases exhibits more positive correlation than the monthly average temperature and the

number of dengue cases. Therefore, precipitation contributes more on the occurrence of dengue disease in the Philippines as compared to the temperature. Thus, intensified surveillance and control of mosquitoes during the rainy season are recommended.

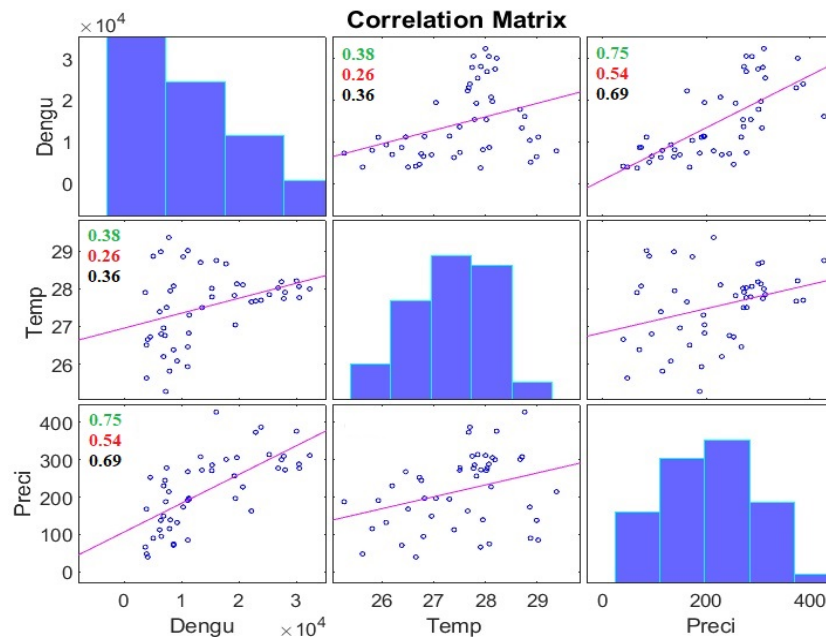


Figure 4: Correlation matrix between the monthly dengue cases and the monthly average temperature and precipitation in the Philippines for the year 2015–2018.

### 3.3 Wavelet coherence analysis

**Wavelet coherence analysis** is a wavelet approach that extracts the time and frequency of a time series and it is the most efficient method in studying non-stationary data which transforms a time series into a wave (4),(14). It is also used to determine whether the presence of a particular periodic frequency at a given time in dengue incidences corresponded to the presence of the same periodic frequency at the same time in the given meteorological variables (24).

We now use wavelet coherence analysis to detect changes in the periodicity between the number of dengue cases and local meteorological variables, namely, average temperature and precipitation. In Figure 5, the coherence between the number of dengue cases and the local meteorological variables varied at different periods and the periodicity of the signals were different through time. The cone of influence (COI) shows the edge effects that became significant at different periodicities. Colors indicate the strength of the coherence, with red areas are highly significant at the 95% level against red noise, and blue areas are not significant at all. For the number of dengue cases and the average temperature, there were significant periodicities detected in the 1–3-month band in the year 2017, 5–6-month and 8–12-month bands between the year 2015–2017 (Figure 5 (a)). Likewise, for the number of dengue cases and the average precipitation, wavelet analysis showed a significant 5–7-month periodicity band between the year 2015–2016 and an 8–12-month periodicity band between the year 2015–2017. There were also some mild periodicities detected at 2–3-month band periods that appear in an occasional pattern (Figure 5 (b)).

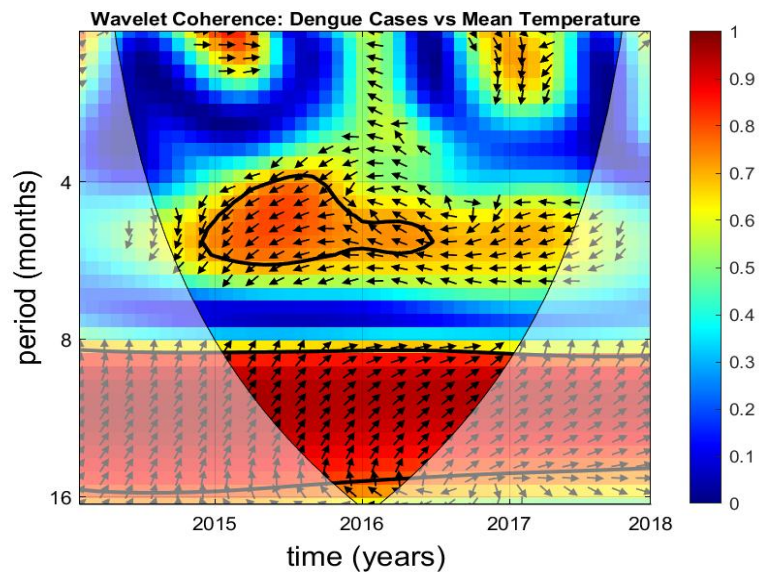


Figure 5(a) wavelet coherence between dengue incidence and temperature

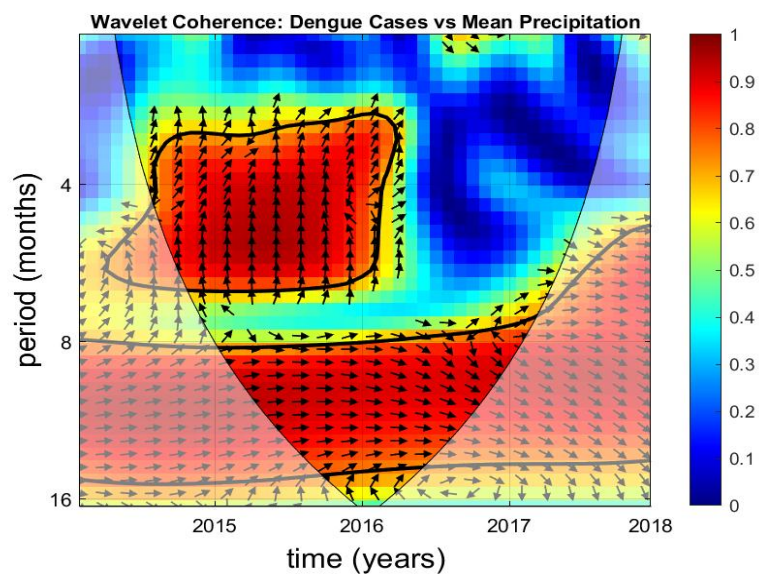


Figure 5 (b) wavelet coherence between dengue incidence and precipitation

Figure 5: Wavelet coherence analysis between the number of dengue cases and local meteorological variables in the Philippines from 2015–2018. Blue color represents low coherence, while red color shows high coherence. The cone of influence (COI) shown indicates the region influenced by the edge effects. (a) Average temperature ( $^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) and (b) Average precipitation (mm).

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Directions of the arrows indicate the degree to which the number of dengue cases and the local meteorological variables are in phase. In Figure 5 (a), the average temperature is leading against the number of dengue cases in the 1–3-month band, 5–6-month band, and 8–12-month band as depicted by the right-down, left-down and right-up arrows. That is, an increase in the number of dengue cases was observed first before an increase in temperature in the aforementioned periodicity bands. Meanwhile, Figure 5 (b) shows that in the 5–7-month periodicity band, the number of dengue cases is lagging against the average precipitation by one fourth of the cycle at that period as depicted by the up arrows. The same figure shows that in the 8–12-month periodicity band, the number of dengue cases and the average precipitation are perfectly in phase as depicted by the right arrows. Hence, the increase on the number of dengue cases are largely attributed to the increase on the average amount of rainfall at the aforementioned months.

## 4 Conclusion

Climate plays a significant role in the dynamics of dengue disease transmission. It affects the lifecycle and biting behavior of mosquitoes. In this study, we investigated the correlation between dengue cases and climatological factors in the Philippines from the year 2015 to 2018. Results show that dengue cases in the country tend to vary according to the season for the said study period. Climatological factors like temperature and precipitation had a significant correlation to dengue fever cases in the Philippines. While the amount of rainfall had the dominant correlation to dengue fever cases compared to the temperature, these climatological factors exhibit associations which coincide with the plausible biological pathways. As the results show, risks were particularly higher in climatological events with high amount of rainfall and moderate temperature. Thus, intensified surveillance and preventive measures during the rainy season must be introduced to local communities in order to deal with the mitigation of dengue cases in the country. Furthermore, the observed wavelet coherent analysis of these climatological variables can be integrated into an early warning system to enhance dengue prediction for better vector control and management in the future. Thus, the transmission of dengue fever brought about by the mosquitoes can be reduced.

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