

# Effect of Soot Particulate Exposure on Placental Malondialdehyde Levels, Placental Weight and Pregnancy Outcomes in Rats (*Rattus norvegicus*)

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Manuscript received: 04 October, 2025. Revision accepted: 10 March 2026, Published: 01 April, 2026.

## Abstract

Particulate Soot, a product of incomplete combustion processes from industry, fuel emissions and other combustion products, is a component of air pollutants known to be hazardous to health because it is cytotoxic. Adverse health effects depend on the length of exposure and levels in the air, through oxidative stress mechanisms its toxicity affects all body systems including the reproductive system. The placenta, which plays an important role in the growth and development of the fetus, is known to be susceptible to damage in oxidative stress events, affecting pregnancy outcomes. Malondialdehyde (MDA), a biomarker of lipid peroxidation, is often used to assess the level of oxidative stress. However, the effects of soot particulate exposure on placental MDA levels and pregnancy outcomes remain poorly understood. This study aimed to investigate the impact of soot particulate exposure on placental MDA levels, and its effect on placental weight and pregnancy outcome of rats (*Rattus norvegicus*). Pregnant rats were divided into a control group and 4 experimental groups. The experimental groups were exposed to soot particulates at concentrations of 532 mg/m<sup>3</sup> and 1064 mg/m<sup>3</sup> for 4 and 8 hours per day throughout gestation, while the control group was exposed to clean air in the chamber. Placental tissues were collected at the end of pregnancy, weighed and examined for MDA levels using the thiobarbituric acid reactive substances (TBARS) assay. Pregnancy outcomes such as fetus weight, fetus length, number of live fetuses and number of intra-uterine deaths were measured and recorded, then statistically analysed. Placental MDA levels in all exposure groups increased significantly compared to the control group ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating oxidative stress. Observations in the exposed groups showed a decrease in placental weight, fetal weight, fetal length, number of live fetuses and increased intrauterine death compared to the control group significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ). Placental MDA levels had a significant effect on placental weight, and pregnancy outcome, the greater the dose and duration of exposure the worse the pregnancy outcome of rats. These findings suggest that exposure to particulate soot causes oxidative stress in placental tissues, resulting in poor pregnancy outcomes. Revealing the potential risks of particulate pollution on reproductive health and foetal development, further research is needed on the mechanism of exposure to find the best solution.

**Keywords:** Soot particulates; oxidative stress; malondialdehyde; placental weight; pregnancy outcome; *Rattus norvegicus*.

## INTRODUCTION

Particulate matter (PM) is classified into three: coarse PM (2.5-10 $\mu$ m), fine PM (1 $\mu$ m-<2.5 $\mu$ m) and ultrafine PM (<1 $\mu$ m). PM 2.5 has been widely studied due to its adverse effects on human and animal health. Soot particulates are one type of PM 2.5 whose effects are associated with oxidative stress events, and inflammation. Airborne particles can enter the airways and deposit in the alveoli, translocate into the blood vessels and circulate throughout the body, entering and impacting all organ systems including the reproductive system and adverse reproductive outcomes. This impact can be seen in the weight of the placenta, an important organ for foetal development. The placenta is highly susceptible to oxidative damage, as measured by biomarkers such as malondialdehyde (MDA) which is a

by-product of lipid peroxidation. Studies have shown that exposure to PM 2.5 during pregnancy can increase MDA levels in placental tissue, potentially impairing foetal viability and development. Veras et al. (2018) showed that exposure to PM 2.5 in pregnant rats led to increased placental MDA levels and decreased foetal weight. Another study by Li et al. (2019) found a correlation between PM 2.5 exposure and increased oxidative stress markers in human placental tissue. These findings emphasise the importance of uncovering the many facets of particulate matter contamination that may affect placental health and pregnancy outcomes.

Although evidence linking particulate matter exposure to adverse reproductive outcomes is growing, the specific effects of soot particulates from industrial pollutants, exhaust emissions and other combustion processes are still poorly understood. Sooty particulates,

which may contain heavy metals, organic compounds and other toxicants, may have different biological impacts than general PM 2.5. For example, a study by Smith et al. (2017) emphasised that specific particulates may exhibit varying toxicity due to differences in chemical composition. In addition, the mechanisms underlying placental oxidative stress and pregnancy outcomes due to such exposure are not fully understood. Research by Wang et al. (2020) showed that particulate-induced oxidative stress can impair placental angiogenesis, and cause fetal growth restriction. These studies have not revealed the implications of different exposure durations and doses on foetal viability and pregnancy outcomes of rats, and further investigation is needed.

Studies by Zhao et al. (2018) and Huang et al. (2019) have explored the effects of PM<sub>2.5</sub> on placental oxidative stress, they have not specifically identified pregnancy outcomes affected by the process. In addition, existing studies often rely on epidemiological data, which may not fully capture the biological mechanisms at play. Experimental models, such as studies in rats, are needed to provide deeper insights into the effects of particulate soot on placental MDA levels and pregnancy outcomes. This knowledge gap highlights the need for targeted research to understand the specific risks posed by soot particulates and the implications for reproductive health. The health risks associated with exposure to soot particulates are a serious public health concern, especially for vulnerable populations such as pregnant women and developing foetuses. The study by Jones et al. (2018) found that heavy metal exposure during pregnancy was associated with increased placental MDA levels and adverse pregnancy outcomes.

This study aimed to investigate the effects of soot particulate exposure on placental MDA levels and pregnancy outcomes in a rat model (*Rattus norvegicus*). By exposing pregnant rats to controlled doses of soot particulates and measuring placental MDA levels, placental weight, fetal weight, and fetal length, this study will provide knowledge on the biological impact of soot particulate-induced reproductive toxicity. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on exposure to soot particulates in different doses and duration of exposure and its impact on the various parameters determined. In addition, the use of a rat model allows for controlled experimentation, to overcome the limitations of epidemiological studies. The findings will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the effects of air pollution and reproductive health, while informing specific public health interventions that can be undertaken to minimise the impact.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study used an experimental design with a post-test only control group design approach. Pregnant rats were

divided into five groups, a control group and four experimental groups, to test the effects of soot particulate exposure on placental malondialdehyde (MDA) levels, placental weight and fetotoxicity outcomes.

### Experimental Animals:

- a) Species: *Rattus norvegicus* (pregnant female rat).
- b) Number: 30 pregnant rats (6 for control group and 24 for experimental group)
- c) Age: 8-10 weeks
- d) Body weight: 200-250 grams
- e) Conditions: Mice were maintained in a controlled environment with a temperature of  $22 \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$ , humidity of 50-60%, and a light-dark cycle of 12:12 hours. Mice were given ad libitum access to food and water.

### Experiment Procedure:

1. Grouping of Experimental Animals:
 

Pregnant rats were randomly divided into two groups:

  - a) Control Group: Exposed to clean air during gestation.
  - b) Experimental Group: Exposed to soot particulates throughout the gestation period (21 days)
    - P1 dose of 532 mg/m<sup>3</sup> for 4 hours per day
    - P2 dose of 1064 mg/m<sup>3</sup> for 4 hours per day
    - P3 532 mg/m<sup>3</sup> for 8 hours per day
    - P4 dose of 1064 mg/m<sup>3</sup> for 8 hours per day
2. Particulate Exposure:
  - a) Soot particulates using carbon black powder and the dose was measured with a digital balance.
  - b) The rats were placed in a specially designed exposure chamber to ensure exposure to particulates at the specified concentration.
  - c) Exposure was conducted for 4 and 8 hours per day (07.00-11.00 and 07.00-15.00) until the end of gestation (21 days).
3. Placental Tissue Collection:
  - a) On the 21st day of gestation, rats were sacrificed by euthanasia method in accordance with ethical guidelines.
  - b) Placental tissue was taken and cleaned from other tissues, weighed with a digital balance.
  - c) Placenta was stored at  $-80^\circ\text{C}$  until further analysis.
4. Malondialdehyde (MDA) Level Measurement:
  - a) MDA levels were measured using thiobarbituric acid reactive substances (TBARS) method.
  - b) Placental tissues were homogenised and reacted with thiobarbituric acid (TBA) at  $95^\circ\text{C}$  for 60 minutes.
  - c) Absorbance was measured using a spectrophotometer at a wavelength of 532 nm.
  - d) MDA levels were calculated using a standard curve.
5. Evaluation of Fetotoxicity Results:
 

Fetuses were removed from the uterus and the following parameters were observed:

- a) Fetus weight: Measured using a digital weighing scale.
  - b) Fetus length: measured with a measuring bar.
  - c) Number of live fetuses: counted per mother
  - d) Intra uterine mortality: counted per mother
6. Statistical Analysis:
- a) Data were analysed using SPSS statistical software
  - b) Data normality test using Shapiro-Wilk test.
  - c) Comparison between groups was done using LSD and Dunnet test for non-normally distributed data.
  - d) Effect analysis using Pearson correlation test
  - e) A p value of <math><0.05</math> was considered statistically significant.

### Research Ethics:

This study was approved by the laboratory animal ethics committee and conducted in accordance with animal welfare guidelines.

Measured Parameters:

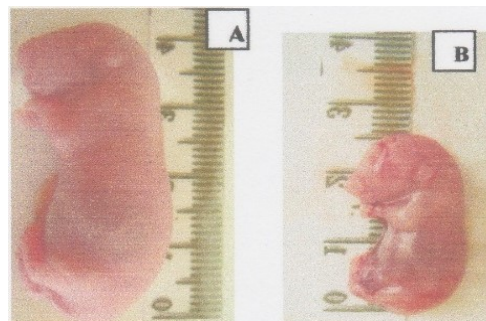
- a) Placental MDA levels as a marker of oxidative stress.
- b) Placenta weight,
- c) Fetus weight and fetus length as indicators of fetotoxicity.

This method was designed to test the hypothesis that exposure to soot particulates during pregnancy can increase placental oxidative stress (characterised by increased MDA levels), decrease placental weight and affect pregnancy outcome in rats. The results of this study are expected to provide insight into the toxic effects of particulates on placental health and fetal development.

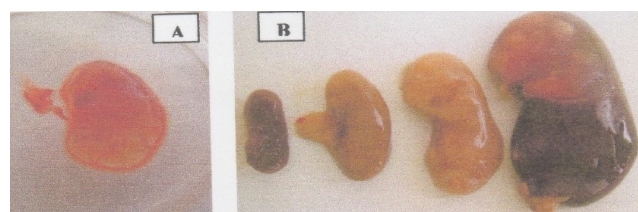
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Parameters measured included placental malondialdehyde (MDA) levels as a marker of oxidative

stress, placental weight and pregnancy outcomes such as fetal weight, fetal length, number of live fetuses and intra-uterine mortality. The results of this study provide insight into the potential risk of exposure to soot particulates on placental weight and fetal development.



**Figure 1.** Comparison of fetal length A. control group ( $3.01\pm 0.28$ ) and B. treatment group ( $2.63\pm 0.94$ ).



**Figure 2.** Intra uterine mortality A. Treatment group of  $1064 \text{ mg/m}^3$  dose (embryo resorption) and B. Treatment group of  $503 \text{ mg/m}^3$  dose (Embryo death occurs at all stages of fetal development).

Comparison of parameters between groups was tested by LSD test for normally distributed data and Dunnet test for non-normally distributed data. The results are shown in the following table:

**Table 1.** LSD test of MDA levels in all groups.

Dependent Variabel	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean difference	P
Placental MDA Level	Control	P1	-2.318600*	.000
		P2	-3.218800*	.000
		P3	-3.616286*	.000
		P4	-5.019000*	.000

\*\*Significant correlation at  $\alpha < 0.05$

\*\*Significant correlation at  $\alpha < 0.01$

Table 1 shows that there is a significant difference in placental MDA levels between the control group and all treatment groups.

**Table 2.** LSD test of placental weight in all groups.

Dependent Variabel	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean difference	P
Placental weight	Control	P1	.0231400	.632
		P2	.0328400	.498
		P3	.0852000	.067
		P4	.1763400*	.001

\*Significant correlation at  $\alpha < 0.05$ \*\*Significant correlation at  $\alpha < 0.01$ **Table 3.** Dunnet test of pregnancy outcomes in all groups.

Dependent Variabel	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean difference	P
Fetus weight	Control	P1	.3204200	1.000
		P2	1.4382800	.133
		P3	1.4998029	.122
		P4	2.2294400*	.025
Fetus length	Control	P1	.3782800	.976
		P2	.7201400*	.022
		P3	1.3286457*	.018
		P4	2.4302400*	.001
Number of live fetuses	Control	P1	.18000	.969
		P2	.27000	.742
		P3	.40857	.086
		P4	.82000*	.014
Number of intra uterine deaths	Control	P1	-.18000	.969
		P2	-.27400	.742
		P3	-.40857	.086
		P4	-.74800*	.018

\*Significant correlation at  $\alpha < 0.05$ \*\*Significant correlation at  $\alpha < 0.01$ 

Analysis of the results by LSD and Dunnet tests as shown in tables 2 and 3 showed that placenta weight, fetus weight, number of live fetuses and intra-uterine mortality, were significantly different only between the control group and treatment group P4. Fetal length was

significantly different between the control group and the P2, P3 and P4 groups. This indicates that at both exposure doses, fetal length has been significantly affected, especially at 8 hours exposure duration.

**Table 4.** Correlation between placental MDA levels and placental weight based on exposure duration.

The correlation between		4 Hours		8 Hours	
		r	Sig	r	Sig
MDA levels	Placenta Weight	-.242	.385	-.589*	.013
	Fetus Weight	-.530*	.042	-.758**	.000
	Fetus Length	-.543*	.036	-.786**	.000
	Number of live fetuses	-.432	.108	-.712**	.001
	Intra uterine death	.433	.107	.675**	.003

\*Significant correlation at  $\alpha < 0.05$ \*\*Significant correlation at  $\alpha < 0.01$ 

Analysis of the results of the study using the Pearson correlation test is shown in Table 4 There is a significant correlation between placental MDA levels with fetal weight and length at 4 hours exposure, while at 8 hours

exposure there is a significant correlation between placental MDA levels with placental weight and all pregnancy outcomes of rats.

**Table 5.** Correlation between placental MDA levels and placental weight.

The correlation between	4 Hours		8 Hours		
	r	Sig	r	Sig	
Weight of Placenta	Fetus Weight	.454	.089	.719**	.001
	Fetus Length	.713*	.003	.844**	.000
	Number of live fetuses	-.719**	.003	.851**	.000
	Intra uterine death	-.716**	.003	.860**	.000

\*Significant correlation at  $\alpha < 0.05$ \*\*Significant correlation at  $\alpha < 0.01$ 

Analysis of the results of the study using the Pearson correlation test between placental weight and all pregnancy outcomes can be seen in Table 5, there is a significant correlation between placental weight with fetal length, number of live fetuses and intra uterine death but not fetal weight at 4 hours exposure, while at 8 hours exposure there is a significant correlation between placental weight with all pregnancy outcomes of rats

## Discussion

### *Interpretation of Results*

The results of this study prove that increasing the dose and duration of exposure to sooty particulate matter influenced the results of this study. Exposure to soot particulates at a concentration of 1064 mg/m<sup>3</sup> for 8 hours during gestation significantly increased placental oxidative stress in all treatment groups, characterised by increased MDA levels. This oxidative stress then damages the cell membranes of the placenta, generally disrupting the process of placenta formation from the beginning to cause a decrease in placental function in providing nutrients and oxygen to the foetus. Disruption of the placental formation process can be characterised by a decrease in placental weight in all experimental groups.

The decreased fetal weight, fetal length, number of live fetuses and increased intra uterine mortality in the experimental groups indicate that exposure to soot particulates proved to be fetotoxic, disrupting growth and reducing fetal viability.

The mechanism underlying the toxic effects of soot particulates was shown to involve the generation of free radicals that cause oxidative damage to placental and fetal cells. These particulates are known to cross the placental barrier, disrupt the placental formation process and directly affect fetal development during gestation.

The results of this study provide evidence that exposure to soot particulates during rat gestation causes increased placental oxidative stress, leads to decreased placental weight, fetal weight, fetal length, number of live fetuses and increases intra uterine mortality in rats as the dose and duration of exposure increases. This indicates that soot particulates have fetotoxic potential, especially in the context of environmental exposure to pregnant women. Further research is needed to identify the specific molecular mechanisms underlying the toxic effects of soot particulates, in order to explore prevention

or intervention strategies that can reduce their negative impact on pregnancy.

Particulate matter (PM) is an environmental pollutant that has been associated with various health effects, especially in vulnerable populations such as pregnant women and foetuses. Various studies have been conducted in an effort to uncover the mechanism of the damage they cause. Ultrafine particles (<1 $\mu$ m) enter through exhalation and translocate into the blood circulation, inducing oxidative stress in the blood and blood vessels. They also induce a systemic inflammatory process, causing the release of pro-inflammatory cytokines and increasing blood viscosity, thereby reducing the ability of oxygen diffusion in the blood. This is corroborated by other studies showing that particulates can cause oxidative stress, inflammation and placental dysfunction, which can impair foetal development. This study investigated the effects of specific particulates, on placental malondialdehyde (MDA) levels and pregnancy outcomes in rats (*Rattus norvegicus*) (Zhang et al., 2020). Oxidative stress occurs when there is an imbalance between the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and the body's antioxidant defence system. The placenta is an organ that is susceptible to damage due to oxidative stress conditions, thus disrupting its function in maternal and foetal circulation. This study showed that particulate matter exposure during pregnancy increased placental MDA levels, which is a marker of oxidative stress and lipid peroxidation (Wang et al., 2021). Specifically, exposure in the early phase of pregnancy impacts the formation of the placenta. Oxidative stress triggers trophoblast formation insufficiency, which then causes placental vascularisation insufficiency, thus disrupting the general placental function in transporting nutrients and oxygen from mother to fetus. The placenta plays a very important role in the exchange of nutrients and oxygen between mother and foetus. Another study supporting this, reported that increased oxidative stress, indicated by high placental MDA levels, can damage placental cell membranes and impair their function. This disruption can lead to inadequate supply of nutrients and oxygen to the foetus, resulting in intrauterine growth restriction (IUGR) and other poor pregnancy outcomes (Liu et al., 2019).

The impact of decreased placental function can be observed in the experimental group where there was a

significant decrease in fetal weight and fetal size compared to the control group. Bobak (2000) reported that particulates have a greater effect on low birth weight if exposure occurs early in pregnancy (1st trimester) than in other trimesters. Other findings suggest that particulate matter exposure may impair foetal growth and reduce foetal viability, possibly due to placental dysfunction and increased oxidative stress (Chen et al., 2022). In addition to growth inhibition, some of these studies also found an increased incidence of foetal abnormalities in groups exposed to specific particulates. These abnormalities suggest that soot particulates may have teratogenic effects, which may interfere with the process of organogenesis and fetal tissue development (Gupta et al., 2023). This could be due to the toxic effects of particulate matter mediated free radical formation, producing reactive molecules that damage cellular components, including lipids, proteins and DNA. The placenta and developing foetus are particularly susceptible to such damage and have a long-term impact on development (Zhang et al., 2020). Organogenesis is known to occur early in pregnancy, so exposure in early pregnancy can cause disruption of organogenesis and lead to defects in pregnancy outcomes.

Fine particulates, such as those investigated in this study, are known to cross the placental barrier and directly affect the fetus. This transplacental pathway allows particulates to induce toxic effects at the cellular level, contributing to oxidative stress and inflammation in fetal tissues (Wang et al., 2021). Particulate exposure not only affects the foetus but also triggers a systemic inflammatory response in the mother. This inflammation can exacerbate the condition of placental dysfunction to reduce the quality of foetal development. The interaction between maternal and foetal responses demonstrates the complexity of particulate-induced toxicity (Liu et al., 2019).

The findings of this study are corroborated by studies on diesel and PM 2.5 emissions in urban areas. These pollutants have also been shown to cause oxidative stress, placental damage and poor pregnancy outcomes, suggesting similar mechanisms of toxicity (Chen et al., 2022). Although this study was conducted in rats, the results have important implications for human health. Pregnant women exposed to high levels of particulate matter from both industrial sources and urban environments are at risk of poor pregnancy outcomes, such as premature birth, low birth weight and congenital abnormalities (Gupta et al., 2023).

The body's antioxidant defence mechanisms, including enzymes such as superoxide dismutase and glutathione peroxidase, play an important role in reducing oxidative stress. Excessive particulate matter exposure can defeat these defences, causing cellular damage. Enhancing antioxidant capacity through dietary or pharmacological interventions may be a potential strategy to reduce particulate-induced toxicity (Zhang et

al., 2020). The effects of particulate exposure during pregnancy may extend beyond the time of birth, affecting long-term health outcomes in offspring. Studies have linked prenatal exposure to pollutants to an increased risk of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disorders, metabolic syndrome and neurodevelopmental disorders (Wang et al., 2021).

The findings of this study emphasise the need for stricter regulation of particulate emissions, especially in areas with high industrial activity. Public health initiatives aimed at reducing particulate matter exposure in pregnant women, such as air quality monitoring and awareness campaigns, may help reduce the risks identified in this study (Liu et al., 2019).

Although this study provides valuable insights, it is important to recognise its limitations. The use of animal models may not fully replicate human physiological responses, and the particulate concentrations used may not reflect real-world exposure levels. Further research is needed to validate these findings in human populations (Chen et al., 2022). Future studies need to explore the specific components of soot particulates responsible for their toxic effects, as well as the synergistic effects of co-exposure to other pollutants. Investigation of the molecular mechanisms behind particulate-induced placental damage and foetal toxicity will be crucial for the development of appropriate interventions (Gupta et al., 2023).

In addition to reducing exposure to particulates, identification of protective strategies to mitigate their effects is essential. This may include the use of antioxidants, anti-inflammatory agents, or other therapeutic approaches to protect placental and foetal health during pregnancy (Zhang et al., 2020). The problem of particulate pollution is not limited to a particular region but is a global issue. Developing countries, in particular, face significant challenges due to rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, making the findings of this study relevant to a wide range of populations (Wang et al., 2021). Raising public awareness about the risks of particulate matter exposure during pregnancy is essential. Educating health workers and pregnant women about the importance of minimising exposure to environmental pollutants can help reduce the incidence of poor pregnancy outcomes (Liu et al., 2019).

This study shows that exposure to particulate soot during pregnancy leads to increased placental oxidative stress, characterised by elevated MDA levels, and adversely affects pregnancy outcomes. These findings emphasise the need for further research and public health interventions to address the risks posed by particulate pollution (Chen et al., 2022).

## CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that exposure to soot particulates during pregnancy leads to increased oxidative stress in

the placenta, characterised by elevated placental malondialdehyde (MDA) levels. This oxidative stress damages the cell membranes of the placenta, disrupting its formation and function in providing nutrients and oxygen to the foetus, and increasing the risk of fetotoxicity. These effects were seen in the decreased fetal weight, fetal length, number of live fetuses and increased intra-uterine mortality in the experimental group. These findings point to the fact that soot particulates interfere with the foetal growth and development process, potentially reducing the quality of pregnancy outcomes.

The mechanism of soot particulate toxicity involves the generation of free radicals that cause oxidative damage to placental and foetal cells. Fine-sized particulates can penetrate the placental barrier which further worsens pregnancy conditions. The results of this study confirm the importance of controlling particulate pollution, especially for pregnant women, and the need for further research to develop protective strategies, such as enhancing antioxidant capacity, to reduce the adverse effects of particulate exposure on pregnancy and foetal development.

**Acknowledgements:** Acknowledgments are expressed in a brief; all sources of institutional, private and corporate financial support for the work must be fully acknowledged, and any potential conflicts of interest are noted.

**Authors' Contributions:** As the sole researcher, the author was directly and actively involved in every stage of the research. The author's commitment was evident from the initial stages of literature search and problem identification to the final stage of report writing. Data collection was carried out independently to maintain consistency and validity, while in-depth analysis was conducted without collaboration. Finally, the author acted as the sole formulator of conclusions and writer of the final manuscript.

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that there are no competing interests.

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