Cosmic ray variations in relation to human physiological state during December 2006

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Abstract— **There is an increasing amount of evidence linking biological effects to solar and geomagnetic disturbances. A series of studies is published referring to the changes in human physiological responses at different levels of geomagnetic activity. In this study the possible relation between the daily variations of cosmic ray intensity, measured by the Neutron Monitor at the Cosmic Ray Station of the University of Athens (http://cosray.phys.uoa.gr) and the average daily and hourly heart rate variations of persons, with no symptoms or hospital admission, monitored by Holter electrocardiogram, is considered. This work refers to a group of persons admitted to the cardiological clinic of the KAT Hospital in Athens during the time period from 4th to 24th December 2006 that is characterized by extreme solar and geomagnetic activity. A series of Forbush decreases started on 6th December and lasted until the end of the month and a great solar proton event causing a Ground Level Enhancement (GLE) of the cosmic ray intensity on 13th December occurred. A sudden decrease of the cosmic ray intensity on 15th December, when a geomagnetic storm was registered, was also recorded in Athens Neutron Monitor station (cut-off rigidity 8.53 GV) with amplitude of 4%. It is noticed that during geomagnetically quiet days the heart rate and the cosmic ray intensity variations are positively correlated. When intense cosmic ray variations, like Forbush decreases and relativistic proton events produced by strong solar phenomena occur, cosmic ray intensity and heart rate get minimum values and their variations, also, coincide. During these events the correlation coefficient of these two parameters changes and follows the behavior of the cosmic ray intensity variations. This is only a small part of an extended investigation, which has begun using data from the year 2002 and is still in progress.**

Key Words—**Cosmic ray intensity, Forbush decreases, heart rate variations, human physiological state**

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last years many studies have been carried out concerning the possible effect that solar and geomagnetic activity might have on human physiological state [2], [4], [6], [20]. Even though there is skepticism in the scientific community regarding the possibility that heliogeophysical changes can influence human health, the results are irrefutable. Human physiological status is influenced by environmental factor changes requiring from the organism and its nervous system a large range of adaptation reactions, which are decreased in case of different diseases [4].

It is obvious that solar or geomagnetic variations could not be solely responsible for all the changes or fluctuations of physiological parameters measured in a human organism. The physiological status of a human being and the abnormalities such as myocardial infractions, brain strokes, cardiac arrhythmias etc. that an organism might exhibit are influenced by many factors such as environmental physical activity and social parameters, smoking, age, etc. Nevertheless it is shown that geomagnetic variations of solar origin can influence at some level the human health and cause a chain of serious problems [24], [28]. It has been shown that, apart from cardiovascular diseases, like
myocardial infraction and brain strokes, also train malfunctions of man – related origin can be influenced by space weather parameters, both in short (during Forbush decreases events) and long – term scale (solar activity cycle). These results on man – related train accidents give additional support to the idea that the capability of operators to

react correctly to the environmental circumstances can be influenced by space weather parameters. In short – term scale the cosmic ray intensity seems to be the best indicator of such correlation [6].

In the last decades many scientists have worked on the impact of space weather parameters, through the geomagnetic field, on different diseases [3], [6], [8], [9], [21]. It has been revealed that cardiovascular circulatory, nervous and other functional systems react under changes of geophysical factors [2], [10], [12], [16], [29], [30]. It has long been claimed that geomagnetic storms and other electromagnetic variations are associated with changes in the incidence of various diseases, myocardial infractions and strokes [11]. Some evidence has also been accumulated on the association between geomagnetic disturbances and increases in work and traffic accidents [7], [18], [19].

Recent studies consider the links between life threatening cardiac arrhythmias, sudden cardiac deaths and the level of environmental physical activity factors like geomagnetic activity and cosmic ray and high energy proton flux [23]. Moreover a new field, called 'Clinical Cosmobiology', is slowly developing. This field studies the relationship between the frequency of total deaths, cardiac arrhythmias, occurrence of acute myocardial infraction, risk related cardiovascular parameters, deaths from cardiovascular diseases, temporal distribution of sudden cardiac death, stroke, life threatening cardiac arrhythmias, homicide and suicide and the level of major environmental physical activity factors [23].

In this work the problem of the possible synchronization of the sudden changes in cosmic ray intensity with the ones of heart rate variations on a daily basis is considered. Cosmic ray intensity data from the Athens Neutron Monitor for December 2006 are used. A comparison of these with those involving the heart rate variations of thirty persons with no symptoms and hospital admission, which have been obtained by the method of Holter electrocardiogram, also in Athens region, is performed.

II. DATA SELECTION AND METHODS

The time period from 4th to 24th December 2006, being very close to the end of the 23rd solar cycle was characterized by extreme solar and geomagnetic activity. In this study hourly, pressure corrected, data of the hadronic component of the cosmic ray intensity obtained from the Cosmic Ray Station of the University of Athens (Super 6NM-64) have been used. This station is located 260m above sea level and detects particles with a cut – off rigidity of 8.53 GV. It is operational since November 2000 providing high quality real-time data through Internet (http://cosray.phys.uoa.gr). These data have a time resolution of 1 hour, 1 min and 1 sec as well, unique in the world [13], [14]. The statistical error is smaller than 0.30% on hourly data.

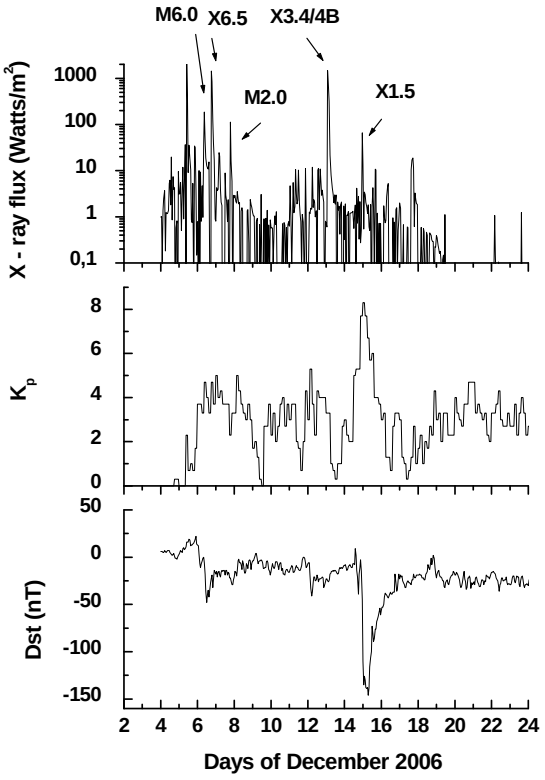

Fig. 1. The X – ray flux as measured by GOES – 12 satellite (top panel), the K_p index (middle panel) and the variation of the Dst index (bottom panel) during December 2006 are illustrated.

Data are also used concerning solar flares registered by GOES satellites. Moreover data for the X-ray flux and the geomagnetic index K_p (http://spidr.ngdc.noaa.gov/spidr/index.jsp) have been used for the time period under study. The geomagnetic index Dst from the World Data Centre for Geomagnetism, Kyoto (http://swdcwww.kugi.kyoto-u.ac.jp/) is also used for December 2006 (Fig. 1, bottom panel).

A series of solar flares of classes M and X was registered starting from 6th December until 14th December. The hourly X – ray flux data from GOES – 12 satellite concerning this period were plotted and the most important solar flares are shown in Figure 1 (top panel). We are mostly interested in the two big solar flares on 13th and 14th December 2006. The first flare was of class X3.4/4 B with maximum at 2:40 UT and the second one

was a solar flare of class X1.5 and maximum at 22:15 UT. These flares produced energetic solar cosmic rays that were guided towards the Earth and resulted in an increase in the count rates of the ground based cosmic ray detectors. The middle panel in the same figure shows the variations of the geomagnetic K_p index. On 15th December K_p had a value of 8^+ that means that a geomagnetic storm occurred.

The data concerning the heart rate variations

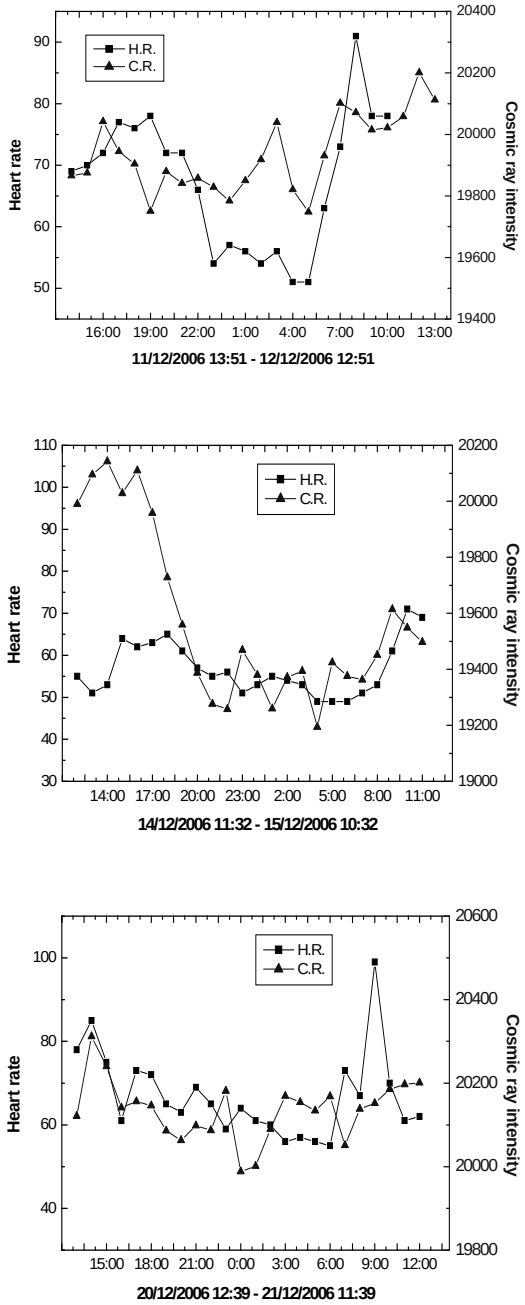

Fig. 3. Time profiles of the hourly values of cosmic ray intensity (triangle) and heart rate (square) of different persons for the days 11, 14 and 20 of December 2006.

came from a group of patients, who were not admitted to the hospital and had no symptoms, but had some cardiovascular problems and that is why they were monitored by the hospital using the method of Holter electrocardiogram. This method records, on

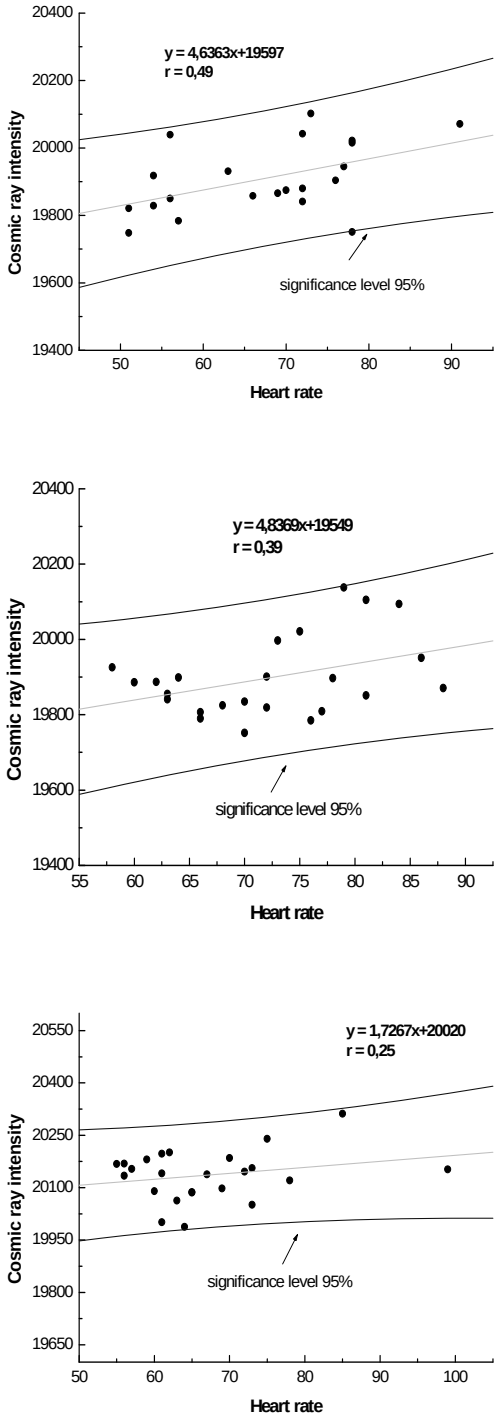

Fig. 4. The equivalent correlation diagrams of the cases given in Fig. 3 with a significance level of 95%.

a 24hour base, the heart rate variations while the patient carries out his/her routine activities. The results, then, are gathered and analyzed by computer.

The Holter electrocardiogram can detect many cardiovascular irregularities, such as arrhythmias and ischemic strokes. Our group consisted of thirty people (ranged from 35 to 88 years old) and our measurements refer to the period of December 2006.

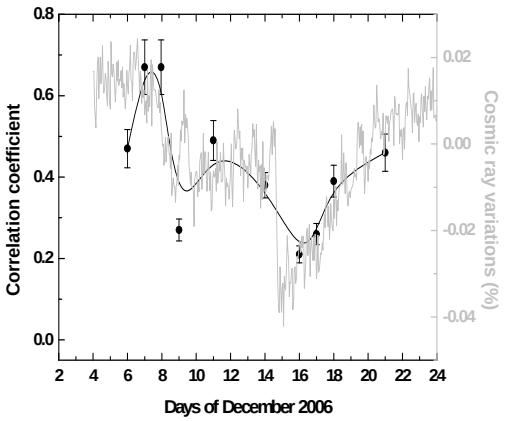

Fig. 2. The percentage variation of the cosmic ray intensity as measured by the Athens Neutron Monitor from 4th to 24th of December 2006 (grey line) and the correlation coefficient of cosmic ray intensity and heart rate variations (black line) are presented.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the biggest problems of biogeomagnetics is to determine those characteristics of solar and geomagnetic activity with the greatest effect on human health. Indices of interplanetary disturbances, which are connected to geomagnetic activity and short-term cosmic ray intensity variations, are used for the research on biological rhythms variations. In [5], [18], [26], [27], [28] it is shown that Forbush decreases are the most sensitive indicators of the connection between geomagnetic field disturbances and health parameters, as incidence of ischemic strokes, myocardial infractions and vehicular traffic accidents. The most remarkable and statistically significant effects have been observed during days of geomagnetic perturbations defined by the days of the declining phase of Forbush decreases in cosmic ray intensity.

Using the hourly data of the cosmic ray intensity recorded at the Cosmic Ray Station of the University of Athens, the normalized cosmic ray intensity variations were calculated using the relation $\Delta I = \frac{I - \bar{I}}{\bar{I}}$, where I is the hourly cosmic ray intensity and $\bar{I}$ is the average cosmic ray intensity. These results are plotted for 4th – 24th December 2006 and are shown in Figure 2 (continuous grey line). Intense cosmic ray events were recorded during this period, such as a series of Forbush decreases started on 6th December and lasted until the end of the month and a solar proton event causing a Ground Level Enhancement (GLE) of the cosmic ray intensity on 13th December. A sudden decrease of the cosmic ray intensity on 7th December was recorded in Athens Neutron Monitor station with amplitude of 3%. Cosmic ray intensity started decreasing on 7th December at 09:00 U.T. (0.02%), took its minimum value (-0.01%) on 8th December, at 17:00 U.T. and then the recovery phase started. Then another Forbush decrease was recorded with amplitude of 4% starting from 14th December at 12:00 U.T. and taking its minimum value on 15th December, at 02:00 U.T. The cosmic ray intensity reached the pre – decrease level on 23rd – 24th December.

During the examined here time interval the index K_p reached the value of 8^+ on 15th December (Figure 1, middle panel) and also the index Dst reached its minimum value (-146 nT) on the same day, which means that a geomagnetic storm was recorded. It is known that a geomagnetic storm occurs when $K_p > 5$ and Dst < - 100nT. The variations of the Dst index for December 2006 are presented in Figure 1 (bottom panel).

Studying in detail the solar, interplanetary and geomagnetic activity of periods connected with Forbush decreases recorded by neutron monitor, during the examined here time interval, very interesting results have been obtained. The hourly variations of the cosmic ray intensity on a daily basis compared to the average heart rate variations of patients are given in Figure 3 for the cases of the above mentioned Forbush decreases. Generally it seems that the heart rate variations coincide with the cosmic ray intensity ones [17]. The correlation diagrams along with the regression line between these two parameters, with a significance level of 95%, are shown in Figure 4. The correlation coefficients for some of the cases under study during December 2006 are presented in Table I.

The two parameters, heart rate variations and cosmic ray intensity, under study coincide during Forbush decreases and the restoration phase of Forbush events. But for time periods when a strong event is detected we are not only interested in the correlation coefficient's absolute value but also its variation during the days of the cosmic ray event. It is noticed that the correlation coefficient decreases

TABLE I

The date, the time interval, the gender, the age and the correlation coefficient between cosmic ray intensity and heart rate variations for a group of patients under study.

	Start of measurement		End of measurement		Gender	Age	Correlation coefficient
	Date	Time	Date	Time			
1	6/12/06	11:58	7/12/06	10:58	M	70	0.47
2	6/12/06	6:12	7/12/06	5:12	F	77	0.47
3	7/12/06	21:43	8/12/06	22:43	M	53	0.67
4	9/12/06	20:36	10/12/06	19:36	F	88	0.27
5	11/12/06	13:51	12/12/06	12:51	F	58	0.49
6	11/12/06	15:22	12/12/06	14:22	F	80	0.32
7	14/12/06	11:32	15/12/06	10:32	M	70	0.31
8	17/12/06	11:12	18/12/06	10:12	F	50	0.26
9	18/12/06	14:53	19/12/06	13:53	F	51	0.39
10	21/12/06	18:47	22/12/06	17:47	F	70	0.46

during the descending phase of a Forbush decrease and increases during the restoration phase of a Forbush decrease [17]. Figure 2 shows this behavior of the correlation coefficient variations in comparison to the cosmic ray variations.

The cosmic ray intensity started to decrease on 6th December and had its minimum value on 15th December. The same variations are, also, noticed for the Dst index (Fig. 1, bottom panel). On the other hand the correlation coefficient's decrease started on 7th December and had its minimum value on 16th December (Fig. 2, continuous black line). A time delay is noticed. This delay might be due to the fact that our group of patients is rather small and consists of only thirty people. The correlation coefficient shows the same behaviour, as described here, with no significant time delay in a wider investigation, which uses a sample of 250 people and data from 2002 [17].

Another interesting result is that this correlation is much stronger in women than in men. For the group of people under study the 40% of women and only the 20% of men had a correlation coefficient over 0.25. Gender differences in acute coronary syndromes, atherogenesis, concomitant pathologies, like diastolic heart failure, hypertension, diabetes, heart rupture, outcomes in coronary revascularization are widely discussed [22]. Unfortunately women show higher risk in revascularization procedures, more heart failure and higher mortality in acute coronary syndromes [22]. When geomagnetic and cosmic ray activity is correlated with the irregularities mentioned above it seems that in women those links are much stronger. In [22] it is mentioned that 'like in many other fields, older women are more susceptible to environmental physical activity compared to younger men with the same pathology'.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In our days there is an increasing amount of evidence linking biological effects to solar and geomagnetic conditions. Reference [20] has published a series of studies of changes in human physiological responses and the natural history of various pathological events at different levels of daily and monthly geomagnetic activity.

Over the last decades many researches have taken place involving biogeomagnetics and the effect of Space weather, through the geomagnetic field, on some diseases [6], [15], [21].

In the last decades many scientists have worked on the impact of space weather parameters, through the geomagnetic field, on different diseases [3]. Changes in the geomagnetic activity level are related to fluctuations in solar activity and are involved in climate regulation and various animals [31], [32] and human behaviour [1]. The living species examined, including man, have adapted to normal variation in geomagnetic activity [20]. Cosmic ray Forbush decreases, which are connected to interplanetary disturbances, can be used as indicators of the relationship between the geomagnetic field fluctuations and health parameters [6]. The most important results are those concerning cardiovascular diseases and diseases of the nervous system, especially strokes, myocardial infarctions and traffic accidents as well [5], [18], [26], [27]. It is proved that the monthly number of acute myocardial infraction is significantly related to solar, geomagnetic and cosmic ray activity [22], [25].

Solar, geomagnetic and cosmic ray activities and their changes have an influence on human health. Comparison of the monthly sudden cardiac death data revealed a significant and inverse correlation with solar activity indices and with geomagnetic

activity indices. A positive correlation was found for cosmic ray activity [24].

In this study we have examined a group of thirty persons for the period 4th – 24th December 2006 and the following conclusions are outlined:

- A significant correlation of cosmic ray activity level with heart rate variations exists. These results are in agreement with those ones noticed also by [22] for the time interval 1983 – 1999.
- The correlation coefficient between cosmic ray intensity and heart rate variations seems to decrease during the declining phase of strong cosmic ray events, such as Forbush decreases and increase during the ascending phase of such events.
- The correlation between cosmic ray intensity and heart rate variations is stronger when women are concerned.

Over the last years many scientists have tried to connect solar and geomagnetic activity to changes of human physiological state. We are mostly concerned about how cosmic ray variations may influence heart rate variations and the effect they may have on different cardiovascular diseases. As there seems to be a connection between these two parameters, it is important to continue this investigation using a larger group of patients during a wider period of time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Thanks are due to our colleagues from the Neutron Monitor stations who have kindly provided us with their cosmic ray data and the cardiological clinic of the KAT Hospital for the heart rate data. We are grateful to the Special Account of Research of Athens University for supporting this study. The authors would like to thank the referees for improving significantly this paper with their comments.

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