

Assessment of Differences in Liquefaction Potential Using Standard Penetration Test and Shear-Wave Velocity Data Obtained at 10 Sites in West Tennessee

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Abstract

This paper compares the liquefaction potential at 10 West Tennessee sites using two sets of field test data. The liquefaction potential at each test site is estimated using Standard Penetration Test (SPT) and Shear-wave Velocity (Vs) measurements. Liquefaction Potential Index (LPI) is determined at each site, and comparisons are made between LPIs obtained using SPT and the Vs data. For most of the sites, LPIs based on Vs data are higher than the LPIs obtained using SPT N-values at the same location. The primary reasons for the differences in LPIs are the variation of empirical relationships for estimating cyclic resistance ratio (CRR), which is different between SPT and the Vs, and the impact of the weighting function of the LPI equation. CRR is mainly a function of $(N_1)_{60CS}$ and Vs_1 values with depth for the SPT and Vs methods, respectively. The weighting function is dependent on the depth of the liquefiable layer. A comparison is made between the number and depth of liquefiable layers of SPT and Vs methods at each site. The number and depth of liquefiable layers are the primary reasons for differences in CRR and the weighting function impact; consequently, LPI.

Keywords: Liquefaction; LPI; SPT; Shear wave velocity; New Madrid seismic zone

1. Introduction

Soil liquefaction is one of the most catastrophic earthquake consequences in which loose saturated soils lose shear strength due to the dynamic loading of an earthquake. Since 1964 and after the disastrous Niigata and Alaska earthquakes, several researchers studied liquefaction e.g., [1-8]. One of the most common methods of liquefaction analyses is the simplified method developed by Seed and Idriss [1], which has been updated and modified over the last five decades. Researchers and engineers use the simplified procedure all around the world. The simplified procedure was initially based on the Standard Penetration Test (SPT) (i.e., SPT N-values). Since 1971, the simplified procedure has been extended to include Cone Penetration Test (CPT), Becker Penetration Test (BPT), Dilatometer Testing (DMT), and Shear Wave Velocity (V_s) measurements. Various researchers have compared the results of the liquefaction potential evaluation using the simplified method based on various in-situ tests [9-18]. The results of these studies indicate that the liquefaction potential outcomes between the SPT N-value and the shear wave velocity (V_s) measurements generally do not agree, and there is no consensus on which field test method provides a more accurate or conservative outcome. Most of these studies do not compare liquefaction potential from different field tests obtained from the same locations. Verdugo [19] argued that the shear wave velocity has some limitations in predicting the liquefaction potential. He concluded that the correlation between V_s and the liquefaction resistance is weak because of the insensitivity of V_s to parameters such as the over-consolidation ratio, which significantly impacts the liquefaction resistance. Additionally, this study compares the liquefaction potential between SPT and V_s field test results obtained at the same location at 10 sites in West Tennessee.

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2. Material and Methods

2.1. Field Test Data

This study utilizes SPT and V_s data obtained from downhole seismic surveys by Pezeshk et al. [20] at 10 sites located in West Tennessee. Table 1 provides the locations of the 10 sites. The 200-ft deep boreholes at Route 14, Sommerville, Covington, Brownsville, Newbern, and Trenton, Tennessee, were drilled in Quaternary Loess that was underlain by tertiary deltaic-marine deposits. The 200-ft borehole at Wynnburg was drilled in Quaternary Alluvial deposits, and the 104-ft borehole at Selmer was drilled in Cretaceous McNairy sand. Jackson and Paris sites were drilled to depths of 200 ft and 100 ft deep, respectively, within the Tertiary Jackson Formation which is underlain by Tertiary Poters Creek clay and Clayton Formation [20]. The site locations and general description of geology are shown in Fig. 1. Shear wave velocity and SPT profiles are provided in Pezeshk et al. [20].

Table 1 Locations of the SPT and V_s data used in this study [20]

Site	Latitude	Longitude
Route 14	35°18.53'	89°49.41'
Sommerville	35°16.74'	89°21.54'
Covington	35°24.02'	89°37.50'
Brownsville	35°32.34'	89°15.60'
Newbern	35°08.28'	89°14.88'
Jackson	35°38.11'	88°55.20'
Selmer	35°10.50'	88°36.24'
Trenton	35°57.93'	88°56.83'
Paris	36°16.03'	88°20.18'
Wynnburg	36°19.27'	89°28.48'

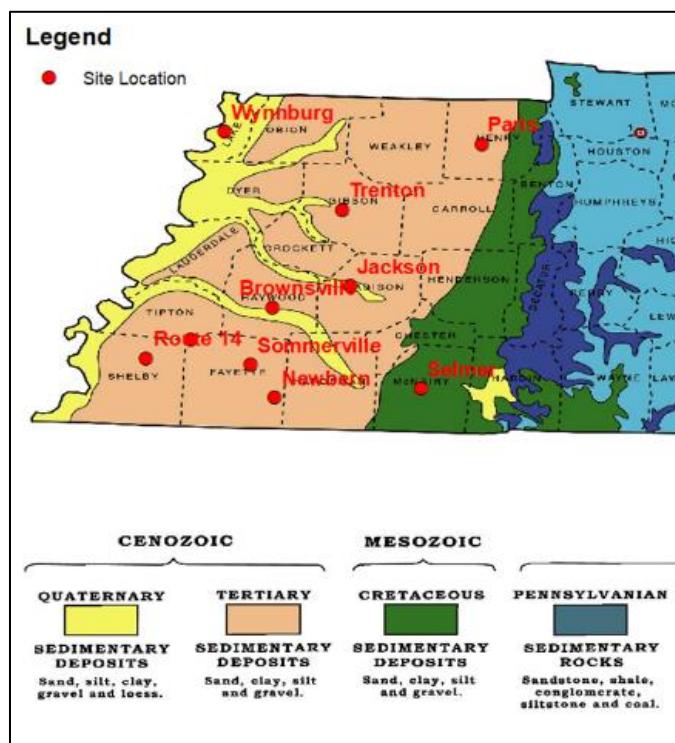


Figure 1 Study area with geology background and the location of investigated sites

2.2. Liquefaction potential analysis

For this study, the liquefaction potential at a given location is based on the Liquefaction Potential Index (LPI) method [3,4]. Many researchers use the LPI method to assess the liquefaction potential in North America [21-24]. The LPI is obtained by:

$$LPI = \int_0^{20} F(z) \cdot w(z) \cdot dz \quad (1)$$

where z is the depth (0 to 20 m), $w(z)$ is the weighting function, which is equal to $10 - 0.5z$, dz is the differential increment of depth, and $F(z)$ is the severity, which is a function of the factor of safety (FS) and it is computed by:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{ll} F(z) = 1 - FS & \text{for } 0 \leq FS \leq 1, \\ F(z) = 0 & \text{for } FS > 1 \end{array} \right. \quad (2)$$

The weighting function decreases with an increase in depth in the LPI procedure, and it is one of the primary reasons for the difference in the LPI values between the SPT and V_s methods because the liquefiable layers depth varies in each method which will be discussed later in this article.

The parameter FS is based on the simplified procedure [1] and is determined at a given depth in a soil profile using the following equation:

$$FS = \frac{CRR}{CSR} \cdot MSF \cdot K_\sigma \cdot K_\alpha \quad (3)$$

where CRR is the cyclic resistance ratio, which is the capacity of soil to resist liquefaction, and CSR is the cyclic stress ratio and represents the exerted dynamic stress induced by an earthquake on the soil. MSF is a magnitude scaling factor that corrects for magnitudes other than 7.5. MSF is determined to be 1 for a moment magnitude (M_w) of 7.5 and is used in this study, K_α is a correction factor for the sloping ground which is considered 1 in this study, and K_σ is an overburden correction factor for soil layers with overburden pressure > 100 kpa, and is computed using:

$$K_\sigma = \left(\frac{\sigma'_{v0}}{P_a} \right)^{f-1} \quad (4)$$

where σ'_{v0} is vertical effective overburden stress; P_a is the atmospheric pressure and is equal to 100 kpa, and f is an exponent function that ranges between 0.6 to 0.8. CSR is given by:

$$CSR = 0.65 \left(\frac{a_{max}}{g} \right) \left(\frac{\sigma_v}{\sigma'_{v0}} \right) r_d \quad (5)$$

where a_{max} is the peak ground acceleration, g is the acceleration of gravity (9.8 m/sec²), σ_v is the total vertical stress, and r_d is the stress reduction coefficient and is computed using a revised equation suggested by Idriss [25] as the following:

$$r_d = \exp [\alpha(z) + \beta(z)M_w] \quad (6)$$

where,

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \alpha(z) = -1.012 - 1.12 \sin \left(\frac{z}{11.7} + 5.133 \right) \\ \beta(z) = 0.106 + 0.118 \sin \left(\frac{z}{11.3} + 5.142 \right) \end{array} \right. \quad (7)$$

One primary difference in evaluating the liquefaction potential using the LPI method and the simplified methods between SPT and V_s data is in determining CRR. Both SPT and V_s -based CRR procedures were utilized from the approved equations of the 1996 NCEER and 1998 NCEER/NSF Workshops [7]. The SPT-based CRR is given by:

$$CRR_{7.5} = \left(\frac{1}{34 - (N_1)_{60CS}} + \frac{(N_1)_{60CS}}{135} + \frac{50}{(10((N_1)_{60CS}) + 45)^2} - \frac{1}{200} \right) \quad (8)$$

where $(N_1)_{60CS}$ is the corrected N-value for clean sand and is given by:

$$(N_1)_{60CS} = \alpha + \beta((N_1)_{60}) \quad (9)$$

where α and β are functions of fines content (FC) and are estimated as:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{ll} \alpha = 0 & FC \leq 5\% \\ \alpha = \exp [1.76 - \left(\frac{190}{FC^2} \right)] & 5\% < FC < 35\% \\ \alpha = 1.2 & FC \geq 35\% \\ \text{and} \\ \beta = 1.0 & FC \leq 5\% \\ \beta = [0.99 + \left(\frac{FC^{1.5}}{1000} \right)] & 5\% < FC < 35\% \\ \beta = 5 & FC \geq 35\% \end{array} \right. \quad (10)$$

Note that for $FC \leq 5$, $(N_1)_{60CS} = (N_1)_{60}$ where $(N_1)_{60}$ is the corrected SPT N-value of field and is calculated by:

$$(N_1)_{60} = N \cdot C_N \cdot C_E \cdot C_B \cdot C_R \cdot C_S \quad (11)$$

where N is the measured standard penetration resistance, C_N is the overburden correction factor and is computed by $\left(\frac{P_a}{\sigma'_{v0}} \right)^{0.5}$, C_E is the hammer energy ratio correction factor, C_B is the borehole diameter correction factor, C_R is the rod length correction factor, and C_S is the correction factor for samplers with or without liners.

The SPT-based $CRR_{7.5}$ in equation 8 was provided by Youd and Idriss [7]. This relationship is valid for $(N_1)_{60CS} < 30$ because it is assumed that for $(N_1)_{60CS} \geq 30$, the soils are too dense to liquefy; therefore, it can be concluded that soil layers with N-values of 30 or higher are non-liquefiable [7]. The CRR procedure based on V_s data [26] is given by:

$$CRR_{7.5} = \left\{ \left(0.022 \frac{V_{s1}}{100} \right) + 2.8 \left(\frac{1}{c} - \frac{1}{V_{s1}} \right) \right\} \quad (12)$$

where V_{s1} is the corrected shear wave velocity for the effective overburden stress and is given by $V_{s1} = V_s \left(\frac{P_a}{\sigma'_{v0}} \right)^{0.25}$, c is a function of FC and is determined based on the FC for a soil layer given by:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{ll} c = 215 \text{ m/s} & FC \leq 5\% \\ c = 215 - 0.5(FC - 5) \text{ m/s} & 5\% < FC < 35\% \\ c = 200 \text{ m/s} & FC \geq 35\% \end{array} \right. \quad (13)$$

The V_s -based CRR equation was developed by Andrus and Stokoe [26]. In the V_s approach, the V_{s1} value of 210 m/s was considered the upper limit value [26]. Soil layers with V_{s1} higher than 210 m/s are deemed to be non-liquefiable [7]. In other words, the V_{s1} value of 210 m/s is considered equivalent to the $(N_1)_{60}$ of 30 for clean sand.

SPT boring logs and V_s profiles of all 10 sites were utilized for this study. The boring logs included SPT N-values at various depths. The V_s values were measured at the boring logs at all 10 sites using downhole seismic surveys.

The reported groundwater level (GWL) for all 10 sites by Pezeshk et al. [20] was used in this study. Therefore, the same unit weights of soil layers with depth and the same GWLs for both SPT and V_s methods at each site were used. Thus, the CSR with depth is the same for SPT and V_s methods at a given site.

In both CRR equations of SPT (equation 8) and V_s (equation 12) methods of liquefaction potential evaluation, there is/are one or more parameters involved that are estimated based on the FC of soil layers. The FC of each soil layer of SPT borings and V_s profiles in this study was approximated using the study by Rix and Romero-Hudock [27], which is based on the Unified Soil Classification System (USCS). Because the location of V_s profiles and SPT borings at each site was the same, the equal amount of FC was considered for both V_s and SPT profiles at each site. This eliminates the variability of FC. Also, it is reasonable that the SPT and V_s profiles of each site have the same soil layers since their location is the same.

In summary, CRR and the weighting function of the LPI are the primary differences between evaluating the liquefaction potential using the LPI and the simplified method using SPT and V_s .

3. Results and Discussion

The LPI was determined at 10 soil boring locations in West Tennessee for the peak ground acceleration (PGA) of 0.5g and the moment magnitude (M_w) of 7.5 using equations (1) and (8) for SPT data and equation (12) for V_s data. According to the Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee, Seismic Hazard Maps report of USGS (Cramer et al. 2004), the average PGA for 2% probability of exceedance in 50 years for this area is estimated to be 0.58 ± 0.09 g.

Table 2 provides a summary of the LPI results. Table 2 also includes the average FC of the soils encountered (16.5 % to 38%), the results of the comparison between the obtained LPIs of the two methods for each site are provided in Table 2. The comparison of obtained LPI using SPT- and V_s -based methods show that for nine sites located in Quaternary Loess, Quaternary Alluvial, Cretaceous McNairy, and Tertiary, the V_s method predicts different liquefaction potential than the SPT method and at only one site (Sommerville) both methods show the same LPI value of 0. It also can be observed that for seven sites the V_s -based method predicts a higher LPI value than the SPT-based method. The obtained LPI values from each of the methods are shown in Fig. 2, and it can be seen that generally, the V_s -based method gives a higher trend of LPI values than the SPT-based method. However, the differences between the two methods do not follow a consistent pattern range, and it varies from site to site [9-10, 14].

To check if there is a statistical relationship between two sets of LPI values of V_s and SPT methods, a correlation coefficient between the results of the two methods was obtained using the following:

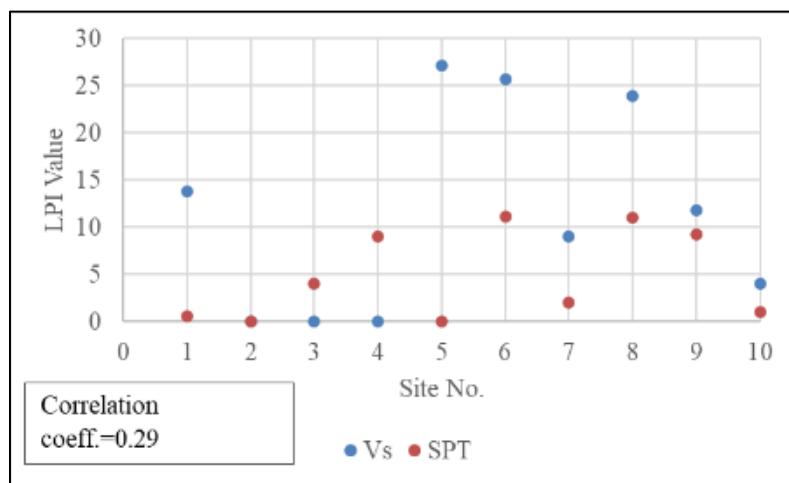
$$r = \frac{\sum(x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum(x_i - \bar{x})^2 \sum(y_i - \bar{y})^2}} \quad (14)$$

where r is the correlation coefficient, x_i is values of x -variable in a sample (e.g., V_s -based LPIs), \bar{x} is the mean of the values of the x variable, y_i is values of the y variable (e.g., SPT-based LPIs), and \bar{y} is the mean of the values of the y variable.

From the correlation coefficient, the statistical consistency between two sets of LPI values was computed to be 0.29 in the range of [0,1], which is statistically interpreted as a weak correlation and shows that there is not a strong relationship between the two sets of LPI values.

Table 2 Comparison of SPT- and V_s -based LPI values for 10 sites

Site No.	Site name	Geology description	Avg. FC (%)	V_s -LPI	SPT-LPI
1	Route 14	Quaternary Loess	31	14	1
2	Sommerville	Quaternary Loess	16.5	0	0
3	Covington	Quaternary Loess	20	0	4
4	Brownsville	Quaternary Loess	38	0	9
5	Newbern	Quaternary Loess	23	27	0
6	Trenton	Quaternary Loess	25	26	11
7	Wynnburg	Quaternary Alluvial	18	9	2
8	Selmer	Cretaceous McNairy	36	24	11
9	Jackson	Tertiary	28	12	9
10	Paris	Tertiary	19	4	1

**Figure 2** V_s - and SPT-based LPI values

Additionally, a hypothesis test on the coefficient of correlation was done to check whether there is no correlation or some correlation between two sets of LPI values. The hypothesis test is defined in Table 3; a two tails hypothesis tests with a null and alternate hypothesis.

Table 3 Conditions of the hypothesis test for this study

Null Hypothesis	$H_0: \rho = 0$	No Correlation
Alternate Hypothesis	$H_1: \rho \neq 0$	Some Correlation

The next step with a hypothesis test is to find the p-value which describes how likely the null hypothesis is true, and it is the area under the standard normal distribution curve between the critical values of t and $-t$ in two tails test. t is calculated by equation 15.

$$t = \frac{r\sqrt{n-2}}{\sqrt{1-r^2}} \quad (15)$$

where r is the correlation coefficient, and n is the sample size. For this study, t is equal to 14.638 which represents a statistically significant difference between calculated LPIs using SPT and V_s .

Once the *t*-value is calculated, using the TDIST function of Excel was utilized to compute the p-value and two tails distributions. For this study, the p-value is equal to $1.93856E-11$, which is much smaller than the significance level of 0.5, leading to rejecting the null hypothesis; therefore, evidence suggests some correlation between the two sets of LPI values.

As noted before, the primary differences in SPT- and V_s - based methods of determining LPI are determination of CRR and the weighting function. For the SPT method, CRR is a function of $(N_1)_{60CS}$ and FC, and for the V_s method, CRR is a function of V_{s1} and FC. The parameter $w(z)$ is a function of the liquefiable layer depth. A liquefiable layer herein is defined as a layer that has three conditions:(1) the layer is saturated, (2) the layer's FC is less than 35%, and (3) V_{s1} or $(N_1)_{60CS}$ value of below the upper limits of 210 m/s and 30, respectively.

The parameter FC is considered the same for both the SPT boring and V_s profile obtained at the same site at each 1.4 m increment to a depth of 20 m. Also, the saturated layers of each site are the same for both SPT and V_s profiles since the same GWL was utilized at each of the 10 locations for both SPT and V_s . Therefore, the upper limit values of $(N_1)_{60CS}$ and V_{s1} is the condition that causes a difference in the number and the depth of liquefiable layers of the SPT and V_s methods. The V_{s1} value of layers at the upper limit value of $(N_1)_{60CS}$ (≥ 30) was extracted for all 10 sites. Fig. 3 illustrates that for 40% of layers at the upper limit of SPT *N*-value the V_{s1} is not in agreement (it is not at the upper limit), and it is lower than 210 m/s which causes an increase in the number of liquefiable layers, and consequently a higher LPI for the V_s method.

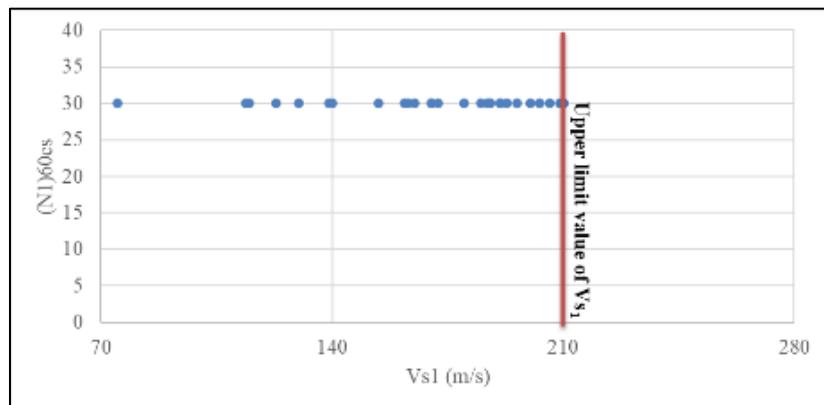


Figure 3 V_{s1} values at the layer with SPT *N*-values of 30 or more

Due to the inconsistency between upper limit values V_{s1} and $(N_1)_{60CS}$, the number of liquefiable layers becomes different at each site following V_s - and SPT-based methods. Therefore, the LPI values can be different between V_s and SPT methods. Table 4 provides the number of liquefiable layers for each site based on V_s and SPT methods. The number of liquefiable layers follows the trend of the LPI values provided in Table 4, which means that for the sites where V_s shows a higher LPI value, the number of liquefiable layers based on the V_s method is more than the SPT method and vice versa.

Table 4 Comparison of SPT- and V_s -based LPI values for ten sites

Site No.	Site name	Number of liquefiable layers based on V_s method	Number of liquefiable layers based on SPT method
1	Route 14	6	3
2	Sommerville	0	0
3	Covington	0	1
4	Brownsville	0	7
5	Newbern	9	1
6	Trenton	5	2
7	Wynnburg	2	1

8	Selmer	5	2
9	Jackson	3	1
10	Paris	3	1

As provided in Table 4, for the majority of sites, the number of liquefiable layers at each site is different between V_s and SPT procedures. Fig. 4 shows a comparison of the depth of liquefiable layers between V_s and SPT methods for all 10 sites. As shown in Fig. 3, the depth of liquefiable layers varies between methods at each location. This discrepancy impacts the weighting function ($10-0.5z$) in equation (1), which decreases with an increase in depth. For example, for Jackson (site 9), both SPT and V_s have three liquefiable layers, but the liquefiable layers are at different depths for each method. Therefore, weighting function values are different; consequently, different LPIs. The discrepancy between the number and depth of liquefiable layers contributes to the differences between SPT- and V_s -based LPIs indicated in Fig. 4.

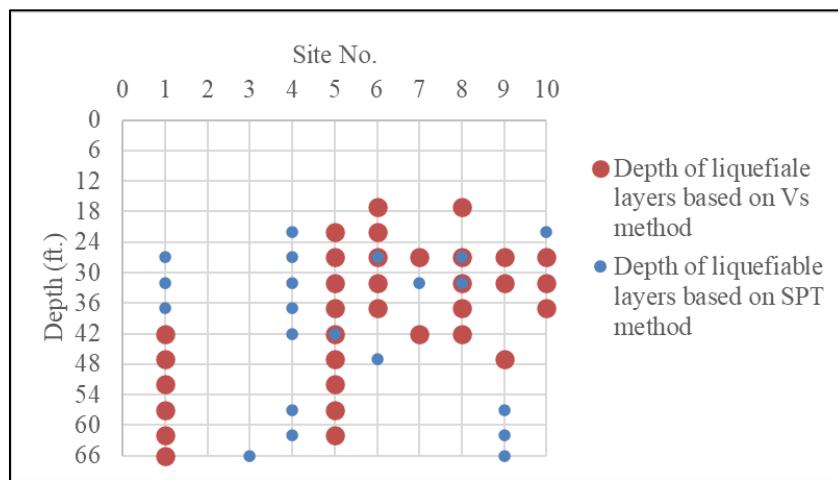


Figure 4 Depth of liquefiable layers based on V_s and SPT methods for each site

In addition to the differences in the weighting functions, the differences in CRR also contribute to differences in LPI between the V_s - and SPT-based methods. The difference between CRRs of each method causes the difference in FS and consequently LPIs. The differences in CRR are provided by the differences in the FC effect and by the variation in field V_s and SPT values. As shown by equations (8) and (12), although the same FC was used for both V_s and SPT methods of analysis for a specific site, the impact of FC on SPT-CRR (α and β) and V_s -CRR (parameter c) may have unequal statistical effects on CRRs that needs to be evaluated using analytical tools. The statistical analysis is not addressed in this study.

The variation in field V_s and SPT values is also a reason for the difference in CRRs of SPT and V_s methods. For example, Kulhawy and Trautmann [28] suggest a coefficient of variation (COV) of 15-45% in field N values, and Toro et al. [29] suggest an approximate COV of 41% for V_s values. EPRI [30] specifies a COV of 0.35 for profiles obtained using geotechnical site investigations and 0.50 for profiles inferred from obtained based on geology or topology. Also, the SPT hammer type, sampler type, rod length, and borehole diameter of SPT measurements were not available for the 10 sites. Thus, these corrections could not be applied, and N_{60} was assumed to be equal to the field N.

Furthermore, according to a study done by Verdugo [19], it was concluded that V_s is basically influenced by soil type, confining pressure, and soil density, but factors that have a high impact on liquefaction resistance such as over-consolidation and pre-shaking do not impact V_s , therefore, by using V_s to compute CRR, the effect of OCR and pre-shaking have been not taken into analysis while the SPT N-value is significantly impacted by one of the OCR functions which is the horizontal effective stress. Additionally, experimental work has found that V_s cannot capture the relative density detail of soil layers, and it is known that the relative density is one of the parameters that significantly affect liquefaction potential analysis [19].

4. Conclusions

This study evaluated the liquefaction potential of soils using two in-situ test data, including SPT and V_s following the general format of the simplified procedure of Seed and Idriss [1] presented by Youd-Idriss [17], and Andrus-Stokoe [26],

respectively. The comparison of liquefaction probability between the two methods for the study area revealed that for all four geology classifications of Quaternary Loess, Quaternary Alluvial, Cretaceous McNairy, and Tertiary with various averages of FC (16.5-38%), there is not an agreement between the SPT-based LPI and the V_s -based LPI. The V_s -based simplified approach predicted a higher LPI than the SPT-based approach for seven sites, and it predicted a lower LPI than the SPT-based procedure for two sites; for only one site both methods predicted the same LPI value.

The primary reasons for the differences in LPI values between V_s - and SPT-based methods are the differences in the determination of CRR and the weighting function. One of the main reasons for differences in CRR and the weighting function is the inconsistency between the upper limit value of V_{s1} and $(N_1)_{60CS}$. The inconsistency in the upper limit values of V_s and N causes the difference in the number and depth of liquefiable layers for each method. The discrepancy in the depth of the liquefiable layers through each method for the same location is the main reason for inconsistency in the weighting function between the two methods. It was found that for the sites where V_s predicts higher LPI value, the V_s also has more liquefiable layers than SPT method and the other way around. Besides, since the SPT-based CRR is a function of $(N_1)_{60CS}$, and the V_s -based CRR is a function of V_{s1} , the inconsistency between V_{s1} and $(N_1)_{60CS}$ of liquefiable layer affects the CRR values of two methods; consequently FS, and LPI.

For future studies, the SPT and V_s will be utilized to develop the liquefaction probability curves in order to assess the impact of the inconsistency between the two methods on liquefaction hazard maps of the West Tennessee area.

The findings of this study are limited to the analysis of 10 sites. Future research will include additional SPT and V_s data (recorded at the same locations) from other sites in the Mississippi embayment and statistical analysis of SPT- and V_s -based CRR equations and variations of field test measurements.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

Hamed Tohidi declares no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

David Arellano declares no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Shahram Pezeshk declares no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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