A High Sensitivity Search for $\nu_e$’s from the Sun and Other Sources at KamLAND

K. Eguchi,¹ S. Enomoto,¹ K. Furuno,¹ H. Ikeda,¹ K. Ikeda,¹ K. Inoue,¹ K. Ishihara,¹,¹ T. Iwamoto,¹,¹ T. Kawashima,¹ Y. Kishimoto,¹ M. Koga,¹ Y. Koseki,¹ T. Maeda,¹ T. Mitsui,¹ M. Motoki,¹ K. Nakajima,¹ H. Ogawa,¹ K. Owada,¹ F. Piquemal,¹ I. Shimizu,¹ J. Shirai,¹ F. Suekane,¹ A. Suzuki,¹ K. Tada,¹ O. Tajima,¹ K. Tamae,¹ H. Watanabe,¹ J. Busenitz,² Z. Djurcic,² K. McKinni,² D-M. Mei,² A. Piepke,² E. Yakukshev,² B.E. Berger,³ Y.D. Chan,³ M.P. Decowski,³ D.A. Dwyer,³ S.J. Freedman,³ Y. Fu,³ B.K. Fujikawa,³ J. Goldman,³ K.M. Heeger,³ K.T. Lesko,³ K.-B. Luk,³ H. Murayama,³ D.R. Nygren,³ C.E. Okada,³ A.W.P. Poon,³ H.M. Steiner,³ L.A. Winslow,³ G.A. Horton-Smith,⁴ C. Mauger,⁴ R.D. McKeown,⁴ B. Tipton,⁴ P. Vogel,⁴ C.E. Lane,⁵ T. Miletic,⁵ P.W. Gorham,⁶ G. Guillian,⁶ J.G. Learned,⁶ J. Maricic,⁶ S. Matsuno,⁶ S. Pakvasa,⁶ S. Dazeley,⁶ S. Hatakeyama,⁶ R. Sivoboda,⁶ B.D. Dieterle,⁸ M. DiMauro,⁸ J. Detwiler,⁸ G. Gratta,⁹ K. Ishii,⁹ N. Tolich,⁹ Y. Uchida,⁹ M. Batygov,¹⁰ W. Bugg,¹⁰ Y. Efremenko,¹⁰ Y. Kamyshekov,¹⁰ A. Kozlov,¹⁰ Y. Nakamura,¹⁰ C.R. Gould,¹⁰ H.J. Karwowski,¹¹ D.M. Markoff,¹¹ J.A. Messimore,¹¹ K. Nakamura,¹¹ R.M. Rohm,¹¹ W. Tornow,¹¹ A.R. Young,¹¹ M.-J. Chen,¹² and Y.-F. Wang¹²

(KamLAND Collaboration)

¹ Research Center for Neutrino Science, Tohoku University, Sendai 980-8578, Japan
² Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487, USA
³ Physics Department, University of California at Berkeley and Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Berkeley, California 94720, USA
⁴ W. K. Kellogg Radiation Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California 91125, USA
⁵ Physics Department, Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104, USA
⁶ Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822, USA
⁷ Department of Physics and Astronomy, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803, USA
⁸ Physics Department, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131, USA
⁹ Physics Department, Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305, USA
¹⁰ Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee 37996, USA
¹¹ Triangle Universities Nuclear Laboratory, Durham, North Carolina 27708, USA and Physics Departments at Duke University, North Carolina State University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
¹² Institute of High Energy Physics, Beijing 100039, People’s Republic of China

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Data corresponding to a KamLAND detector exposure of 0.28 kton-year has been used to search for $\bar{\nu}_e$’s in the energy range 8.3 MeV < E$_{\bar{\nu}_e}$ < 14.8 MeV. No candidates were found for an expected background of 1.1±0.4 events. This result can be used to obtain a limit on $\bar{\nu}_e$ fluxes of any origin. Assuming that all $\bar{\nu}_e$ flux has its origin in the Sun and has the characteristic $^8$B solar $\nu_e$ energy spectrum, we obtain an upper limit of 3.7 × 10$^{-4}$ cm$^{-2}$ s$^{-1}$ (90% C.L.) on the $\bar{\nu}_e$ flux. We interpret this limit, corresponding to 2.8 × 10$^{-4}$ of the Standard Solar Model $^8$B $\nu_e$ flux, in the framework of spin–flavor precession and neutrino decay models.

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Of the many mechanisms that have been suggested to explain the solar neutrino problem, neutrino oscillations are strongly favored by the data. Assuming CPT invariance, the recent observation of reactor $\bar{\nu}_e$ disappearance by the Kamioka Liquid Scintillator Anti-Neutrino Detector (KamLAND), combined with direct measurements of the solar neutrino flux, indicates that the oscillation parameters lie in the Mikheyev-Smirnov-Wolfenstein (MSW) Large Mixing Angle (LMA) region. However, the limited precision of current measurements still allows for the possibility that other mechanisms play a sub-dominant role. Since further study of the nature of neutrinos and the properties of the Sun is vital, we report in this Letter on a search for solar $\bar{\nu}_e$’s.

There are several conceivable mechanisms which would lead to a $\bar{\nu}_e$ component in the solar flux incident on Earth. Electron neutrinos with a non-zero transition magnetic moment can evolve into $\bar{\nu}_\mu$’s or $\bar{\nu}_\tau$’s while propagating through intense magnetic fields in the solar core. These neutrinos can, in turn, evolve into $\bar{\nu}_e$’s via flavor oscillations. There is also neutrino decay, in which a heavy neutrino mass eigenstate decays into a lighter anti-neutrino mass eigenstate.

The analysis presented in this Letter concerns a search for $\bar{\nu}_e$’s regardless of origin. Possible non-solar sources of $\bar{\nu}_e$’s at KamLAND include Weakly Interacting Massive Particle (WIMP) annihilation in the Sun and Earth and relic supernova neutrinos, either of which could contribute to a continuous $\bar{\nu}_e$ flux. The event rates from these and other non-solar sources are expected to be small, however, and we choose to focus on models that predict a flux of $\bar{\nu}_e$’s descendant from solar neutrinos.

KamLAND was designed to study the flux of reactor
The detection efficiency for inverse $\beta$-decay events in this analysis was similar to that described in [24] and was found to be accurate to within 2% from comparison with the observed energy distribution of the $\beta$ decay of cosmogenically produced $^{12}$B and $^{12}$N (Figure 1). The measured energy resolution of KamLAND for this data set was 7.5%/ $\sqrt{E_{\beta\text{e}}}$ (MeV). Events with 8.3 MeV $< E_{\bar{\nu}_{e}} < 14.8$ MeV, followed 0.5 $\mu$s - 660 $\mu$s later by a delayed event depositing between 1.8 MeV and 2.6 MeV of energy, were selected. The distance between the prompt and delayed vertices was constrained to be less than 160 cm and both vertices were required to be within 550 cm of the detector center in order to suppress backgrounds due to natural radioactivity and muon spallation. Backgrounds were further reduced by using OD data. Anti-neutrino candidates associated with detected muons were discarded if they occurred within 2 s after un-reconstructed muons, within 2 s after muons depositing at least 3 GeV, or within 2 s and less than 3 m from a reconstructed muon track. Spallation neutrons associated with tagged muons were also removed and did not contribute to the background.

Figure 2 shows the delayed versus prompt energy distribution for events after all selection cuts, except those on the prompt and delayed energies themselves. Taking into account the 12% deadtime associated with muon rejection, the total sample livetime, corresponding to the period March 4 - December 1, 2002, was 185.5 days. The detection efficiency for inverse $\beta$-decay events PMTs to reconstruct a muon track for all events containing OD data.
was estimated from Monte Carlo simulation and calibration data to be 84.2 ± 1.5%. The main contributions to the detection inefficiency were the cuts on the distance between the prompt and delayed vertices (89.8 ± 1.6%), the time between the prompt and delayed vertices (98.3 ± 0.3%), neutron capture on protons (99.5%), and the energy of the delayed event (98.9 ± 0.1%). The efficiency of the vertex-separation cut was determined by a Monte Carlo simulation checked against AmBe neutron source data. The neutron capture time distribution with mean 210 ±5 μs and the delayed energy cut efficiency were measured using both AmBe neutron and spallation neutron data.

No events were observed in the signal region over the 0.28 kton-year sample. A separate analysis of the KamLAND data was carried out as a cross-check using a subset of the 0.28 kton-year sample presented here. The results of both analyses were consistent.

The energy spectrum of reactor $\bar{\nu}_e$’s extends to about 8.5 MeV and may have constituted a small background in the solar $\bar{\nu}_e$ energy region due to the detector’s finite energy resolution. The number of background events was estimated to be 0.2 ± 0.2 and uncertainties in the detector energy scale and neutrino oscillation parameters were the dominant sources of error. The background from atmospheric neutrinos was estimated, using the Barr-Gaisser-Stanev flux, to be 0.001 events.

Cosmic ray muons interact in and near the detector producing spallation neutrons with an energy spectrum extending up to several hundred MeV. These neutrons constituted a source of background for the inverse $\beta$-decay measurement as the prompt deposit of the neutron’s kinetic energy followed ~210 μs later by the capture of the thermal neutron was indistinguishable from the inverse $\beta$-decay event signature. As outlined below, we estimated the spallation neutron contribution to the background using a sample of neutrons selected from the data.

Spallation neutron cuts were the same as for $\bar{\nu}_e$ candidates except that the fiducial volume cut was dropped and the muon-related cuts were replaced by the requirement that at least 5 PMTs in the OD fired. The radial distribution of the remaining candidates was fitted in order to obtain a smooth extrapolation of the fast neutrons into the fiducial volume. The resulting fitted function was integrated inside the volume to estimate the expected number of fast neutron events $N_{fn}$ meeting the selection criteria. We used this quantity to estimate the two components of the fast neutron background by multiplying $N_{fn}$ by a factor of 0.11, determined from Monte Carlo calculations, to obtain the contribution from fast neutrons due to muons passing through the rock near the detector and by scaling $N_{fn}$ by the OD detector inefficiency to obtain the contribution from fast neutrons produced by muons passing through the OD but missing the ID. Summed, these two components contributed 0.3 ± 0.2 events to the background.

We estimated the background due to accidental coincidences using data events falling within an off-time delayed coincidence window of 1–10 s. Two hundred and seventeen such coincidences were found, corresponding to a background contribution of 0.02 events after normalizing to the width of the $\bar{\nu}_e$ delayed coincidence window.

The residual backgrounds from cosmogenic $^8$He ($t_{1/2} = 0.12$ s) and $^9$Li ($t_{1/2} = 0.18$ s) decays were estimated by determining the total number of these events in the data sample and extrapolating into the $\bar{\nu}_e$ signal region using known decay times and vertex distributions. Above 8.3 MeV, the $^9$Li contribution dominated and, accordingly, analyses in that energy region dealt exclusively with $^8$He. The residual contribution to the background was calculated to be 0.6 ± 0.2 events.

Table I summarizes the background estimates for this data set.

| Background Source       | Expected Events |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Reactor $\bar{\nu}_e$  | 0.2 ± 0.2       |
| Atmospheric neutrinos   | 0.001           |
| Fast neutrons ($N_{fn}$)| 0.3 ± 0.2       |
| Accidental coincidences | 0.02            |
| $^8$He & $^9$Li         | 0.6 ± 0.2       |
| **Total**               | 1.1 ± 0.4       |

TABLE I: Estimated backgrounds for the inverse $\beta$-decay signal in the energy range of 8.3 MeV < $E_{\bar{\nu}_e}$ < 14.8 MeV for 185.5 live-days.

The $\bar{\nu}_e$ flux integrated over the energy range 8.3–14.8 MeV is obtained from:

$$\Phi_{\bar{\nu}_e} = \frac{N_{signal}}{\sigma \times \epsilon \times T \times \rho_p \times f_v},$$

where $N_{signal}$ is the number of detected $\bar{\nu}_e$’s, $\sigma = 6.9 \times 10^{-42}$ cm$^2$ and $\epsilon = 0.84$ are the cross section and detection efficiency, respectively, averaged over energy, $T = 1.6 \times 10^7$ s is the livetime, and $\rho_p \times f_v = 4.6 \times 10^{31}$ is the number of target protons in the fiducial volume $f_v$ (radius 550 cm). For calculating the average cross section and detection efficiency, the shape of the Standard Solar Model $^8$B flux without oscillations was used.

Systematic uncertainties in the quantities in Equation 2 are tabulated in Table III. The systematic uncertainty in the number of target protons ($\rho_p \times f_v$) was obtained by adding in quadrature the 2.1% uncertainty in the amount of scintillator in the balloon and the estimated 3.7% uncertainty in the fiducial volume. This latter estimate is based on the difference between the measured number of spallation products in the fiducial
volume and the expected number assuming that the spallation products were uniformly distributed. The contribution from the energy threshold was calculated using the uncertainties in the energy scale (2%) and the slope of the neutrino flux at the threshold of 8.3 MeV.

| Quantity                  | Systematic Uncertainty (%) |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Detection efficiency (ε)  | 1.6                        |
| Cross section (σ)         | 0.2                        |
| Number of target protons  | 4.3                        |
| Energy threshold          | 4.3                        |
| Livetime (T)              | 0.07                       |
| **Total**                 | **6.3**                    |

TABLE II: Systematic uncertainties in quantities used to determine the flux of solar $\bar{\nu}_e$.

We derived an upper limit on $\Phi_{\bar{\nu}_e}$ using the Feldman-Cousins unified approach [15] supplemented with Bayesian modifications to account for the errors on nuisance [16] and background parameters [17, 18, 19]. For no observed events, the upper limit of the $\bar{\nu}_e$ flux was $3.7 \times 10^2$ cm$^{-2}$s$^{-1}$ at 90% CL. Using the prescription described in [12], the sensitivity of this measurement was $7.9 \times 10^2$ cm$^{-2}$s$^{-1}$ (90% C.L.). Normalizing to the solar $^8$B $\nu_e$ flux [20] in the analysis energy window (8.3 MeV < $E_{\nu_e}$ < 14.8 MeV, containing 29.5% of the total flux of $5.05 \times 10^6$ (1.00$^{+0.20}_{-0.16}$) cm$^{-2}$s$^{-1}$ [21]), this flux limit corresponds to an upper limit on the neutrino conversion probability of $2.8 \times 10^{-4}$ at the 90% C.L. and represents a factor of 30 improvement over the best previous measurement [21].

We have assumed a non-oscillatory solar $\bar{\nu}_e$ flux up to now in order to retain as much generality as possible but, in the following, we have interpreted the KamLAND upper limit on the solar $\bar{\nu}_e$ flux in the framework of two models: spin-flavor precession combined with neutrino oscillations and neutrino decay.

Assuming that the solution to the solar neutrino problem lies within the LMA region of parameter space and that the MSW effect is a dominant mechanism affecting the solar neutrino flux, we followed the treatment of [22, 23] (taking the value of 34 degrees for the mixing angle) and obtained the following limit on the product of the neutrino transition magnetic moment $\mu$ and the transverse component of the magnetic field $B_T$ in the Sun at a radius of 0.05$R_s$:

$$\frac{\mu}{10^{-12} \mu_B} \frac{B_T(0.05R_s)}{10 \text{ kG}} < 1.3 \times 10^3$$  (3)

The current best limit on the neutrino magnetic moment is from the MUNU experiment [24]: $\mu_{\nu_e} < 1.0 \times 10^{-10} \mu_B$ (90% C.L.).

Similarly, for quasi-degenerate neutrino masses, we were able to constrain the lifetime for $\nu_2$, the heavier neutrino, to $\tau_2/m_2 > 0.067$ s/eV. If the neutrino mass spectrum is hierarchical, the limit is weaker and for $m_2$ of about 0.01 eV ($\sim \sqrt{\Delta m_{12}^2}$), $\tau_2 > 11$ µs. Our limit, obtained using the appropriate decay branching ratio for final states containing a $\bar{\nu}_e$, represents an improvement over the current bound of $\tau/m > 10^{-4}$ s/eV suggested in [6].

To summarize, we have described a search for $\bar{\nu}_e$'s in the energy range (8.3 MeV < $E_{\bar{\nu}_e}$ < 14.8 MeV) with KamLAND. The KamLAND detector's source-independent sensitivity allows for the measurement of $\bar{\nu}_e$ fluxes independent of origin. No events were found in the 185.5 live-day data set, allowing for an upper limit to be set on the flux from any source producing $\bar{\nu}_e$'s in the appropriate energy range. We have obtained a flux limit of $\Phi_{\bar{\nu}_e} < 3.7 \times 10^2$ cm$^{-2}$s$^{-1}$ (90% C.L.), assuming a solar origin and an un-oscillated $^8$B neutrino energy spectrum. This limit has been used to constrain models of neutrino spin–flavor precession and neutrino decay.

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* Present address: Institute for Cosmic Ray Research, University of Tokyo
† Present address: International Center for Elementary Particle Physics, University of Tokyo

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