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Numerical demonstration of 3-12 μm supercontinuum generation in large-core step-index chalcogenide fibers pumped at 4.5 μm

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Abstract: We numerically demonstrate the generation of a 3-12 μm mid-infrared supercontinuum in a large-core (20 μm diameter) step-index fiber made from highly nonlinear chalcogenide (As_2Se_3) pumped at 4.5 μm with 40ps, 1kW peak power pulses.

OCIS codes: (190.4370) Nonlinear optics, Fibers; (190.5530) Pulse propagation and temporal solitons

1. Introduction

Mid-infrared (IR) supercontinuum (SC) sources have great potential for improving spectral analysis tools, because of their spatial coherence and high power density over a broad bandwidth. A 1-4.5 μm SC source was for example recently used in hyperspectral IR microscopy to demonstrate simultaneous analysis at multiple wavelengths [1]. In the food and pharmaceutical industry, analysis methods, such as Fourier Transform IR (FTIR) spectroscopy, can significantly be improved by using a broadband high-power SC source [2], and mid-IR SC sources are also ideal for stand-off ranged detection, where high power density over a broad spectral range is necessary to acquire as much information as possible about an ensemble of potentially hazardous substances from a safe distance [3]. Current state-of-the-art mid-IR SC sources cover 1-4.5 μm using ZBLAN step-index fibers (SIFs) [4].

Fig. 1. Output spectrum from a 3m long chalcogenide SIF with $d=20\mu\text{m}$ and $\text{NA}=0.5$ pumped at 4.5 μm with a 10ps (solid), 20ps (dotted), and 40ps (dashed) pulse with 1kW peak power. Solid (dashed) red vertical line marks the pump and λ_{ZD} respectively.

With an aim to allow for early cancer detection with mid-IR SC sources we here consider the use of large-core (20 μm diameter) chalcogenide SIFs pumped with a mode-locked Pr-doped chalcogenide fiber laser giving 40ps pulses at 4.5 μm to generate a 3-12 μm SC. This would cover the absorption bands of key biological compounds, such as proteins, lipids, carbohydrates, and nucleotides [5]. The use of large-core SIFs would increase the power

handling capability and the robustness of the SC source. The numerically obtained SC spectra shown in Fig. 1 (see details below) demonstrate that such a 3-12 μm SC source is feasible using current chalcogenide fiber technology.

2. Numerical results

We consider As_2Se_3 chalcogenide SIFs and material data summarized in [6]. Thus, the refractive index is given by the Sellmeier equation $n^2 = 1 + \lambda^2 [A_1/(\lambda^2 - a_1^2) + A_2/(\lambda^2 - a_2^2) + A_3/(\lambda^2 - a_3^2)]$, where $A_1 = 2.234921$, $A_2 = 0.347441$, $A_3 = 1.308575$, $a_1 = 0.24164$, $a_2 = 19$, $a_3 = 2a_1$, with λ given in microns [6]. The nonlinear coefficient is $n_2 = 2.4 \times 10^{-17} \text{m}^2/\text{W}$ and the total nonlinear response is $R(t) = (1 - f_R)\delta(t) + f_R h_R(t)$, where the fractional Raman contribution is $f_R = 0.115$ and the delayed Raman response function is $h_R(t) = [(\tau_1^2 + \tau_2^2)/(\tau_1 \tau_2^2)] \exp(-t/\tau_2) \sin(t/\tau_1)$, with $\tau_1 = 23.1 \text{fs}$ and $\tau_2 = 195 \text{fs}$. In Fig. 2 we summarize our calculated fiber dispersion and loss properties using a Numerical Aperture (NA) assumed to be frequency constant. Here the total loss is defined as a constant material loss of 1 dB/m plus confinement loss. Material losses of As_2Se_3 chalcogenide much less than 1 dB/m have been demonstrated by several groups [6,7].

Fig. 2. Left: dispersion (a) and total loss (b) versus wavelength for a $d=20\mu\text{m}$ (solid curves) and $d=10\mu\text{m}$ chalcogenide SIF for different values of NA. Right: Zero-dispersion wavelength λ_{ZD} (a), dispersion at $4.5\mu\text{m}$ $D_{4.5}$ (b), and 3dB/m total loss edge $\lambda_{3\text{dB}}$ (c) of a $d=20\mu\text{m}$ (solid), $d=10\mu\text{m}$ (dashed), and $d=5\mu\text{m}$ (dotted) chalcogenide SIF versus NA.

Figure 2 shows that if we want to use a $20\mu\text{m}$ ($10\mu\text{m}$) core diameter and generate an SC extending to $12\mu\text{m}$ then we need an NA of at least 0.3 (0.45) in order to overcome confinement loss. We also see that a $5\mu\text{m}$ core gives too high a loss. Looking at the dispersion we see that our $4.5\mu\text{m}$ pump will always be in the normal dispersion regime. We therefore need to bring the zero-dispersion wavelength (λ_{ZD}) as close as possible to the pump to minimize the number of Raman Stokes orders necessary to transfer light across the λ_{ZD} into the anomalous dispersion regime and generate solitons that can further extend the SC to $12\mu\text{m}$. For $\text{NA} > 0.3$ the $10\mu\text{m}$ core fiber has too long a λ_{ZD} to be of use, except for very high NA above 0.7. Thus, focussing on the $20\mu\text{m}$ core diameter fiber, we see that λ_{ZD} and the absolute value of the dispersion at the pump both decrease with NA. At a reasonable NA value of 0.5, achievable with today's chalcogenide fiber technology, $\lambda_{\text{ZD}} = 6.74\mu\text{m}$. We have modeled SC generation in 3m of such a fiber using the generalized nonlinear Schrödinger equation as detailed in [8]. For a fixed feasible peak power of 1kW the results shown in Fig. 1 clearly demonstrate that a 3-12 μm SC can be generated with a pulse length of 40ps or longer.

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