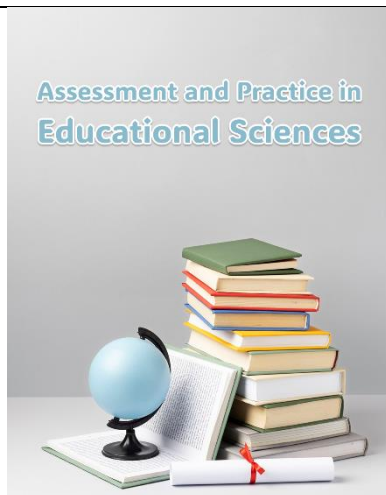




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Article type:
Original Research

Article history:
Received 03 January 2025
Revised 04 March 2025
Accepted 07 March 2025
Published online 10 March 2025

How to cite this article:
Hashemi, S.M., Talebi, G.A & Ranjbar, M. (2025). Identifying Strategic Organizational Culture Factors with a Psychological Approach in Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. *Assessment and Practice in Educational Sciences*, 3(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.61838/japes.163>

Identifying Strategic Organizational Culture Factors with a Psychological Approach in Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences

ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted with the aim of identifying the strategic factors of organizational culture using a psychological approach in Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. The study is applied in purpose and uses a mixed-methods design (qualitative–quantitative) of the sequential exploratory type. In the qualitative phase, the grounded theory method and analysis of semi-structured interviews with 25 experts in the field of public management were used, and ultimately, 12 individuals were selected as the final sample through the snowball sampling method. The data collection instrument in the quantitative phase was a researcher-made questionnaire containing 65 items across 6 dimensions and 13 components, the validity and reliability of which were confirmed through expert judgment, factor loadings, and Cronbach's alpha. The findings indicated that organizational strategies—particularly in the dimensions of training and human development, as well as interpersonal communication—have a significant impact on the formation of an effective organizational culture with a psychological approach. The results of the structural equation modeling further showed that the strategies explain approximately 27.5% of the variance in organizational culture. Accordingly, the formulation of strategic policies based on training, interaction, and human development can serve as a foundation for establishing an effective, human-centered, and psychologically oriented culture within the organization. In conclusion, an effective organizational culture is the product of systematic interaction among strategic factors within the organizational context.

Keywords: organizational culture, psychological approach, Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences

Introduction

Organizational culture is widely regarded as one of the most influential constructs in shaping employee behavior, organizational effectiveness, and long-term sustainability. Scholars argue that culture operates as the implicit infrastructure of organizations, shaping perceptions, expectations, and patterns of interaction across all levels (1). In contemporary management scholarship, organizational culture is no longer viewed as merely a set of shared values, but rather as a dynamic psychological, structural, and relational system that guides decision-making and determines the organization's adaptive capacity. As workplaces face increasingly complex social, technological, and ethical challenges, attention to the psychological foundations

of culture—such as psychological safety, emotional well-being, trust, and identity—has become critical (2). This shift reflects a growing recognition that an effective organizational culture requires not only strategic planning, but also deep understanding of human behavior, cognitive processes, and interpersonal mechanisms.

The psychological dimensions of organizational culture have gained prominence in recent years, as studies emphasize that employees' mental states, motivations, and psychological capital are essential determinants of organizational performance (3). Psychological capital—including hope, resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy—creates the emotional and cognitive conditions necessary for engagement and innovation. When organizational culture supports psychological resources, employees demonstrate improved adaptability, higher satisfaction, and stronger commitment to organizational objectives. Conversely, cultures lacking psychological safety, trust, or respect tend to generate burnout, dissatisfaction, and performance decline (4). Thus, psychological well-being is not simply an individual characteristic; it is an organizational asset enhanced or undermined by culture.

Researchers have increasingly highlighted that culture operates as a strategic mechanism for shaping behavior, aligning people with goals, and driving collective performance. In educational and healthcare contexts—where professional interactions, emotional labor, and human service delivery are central—the strategic design of organizational culture becomes even more vital (5). Institutions with strategically aligned cultural frameworks demonstrate better communication, stronger professional identity, and enhanced quality of service. This alignment is especially critical in public and academic institutions such as universities of medical sciences, where professional interactions and service outcomes directly shape community well-being. Recent empirical work emphasizes that building a culture grounded in shared values, human development, and supportive relationships strengthens both institutional effectiveness and psychological stability among employees (6).

Organizational culture also functions as a strategic asset in knowledge-based and innovation-driven environments. The emphasis on knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, and intellectual capital has grown substantially, as organizations increasingly rely on intangible assets for competitive advantage. Studies confirm that knowledge management practices are deeply influenced by cultural norms and psychological climates that encourage openness, collaboration, and trust (7). When culture supports intellectual engagement, organizations experience improved strategic decision-making, innovation capacity, and problem-solving abilities. Intellectual capital—comprising human, structural, and relational capital—flourishes most effectively in cultures that promote psychological safety, communication, and continuous learning (8). Thus, culture and human capital operate in a mutually reinforcing cycle that contributes to long-term organizational performance.

Recent scholarship has also explored culture from the perspective of leadership and organizational transformation. Leadership style influences the collective psychological environment, shaping employees' emotional security and readiness for change (9). Leaders who cultivate open communication, empathy, and participatory decision-making tend to create cultures where employees feel valued and empowered. This enhances organizational resilience and supports transformation initiatives. As organizational environments become more complex, emotional intelligence, psychological insight, and human-centered leadership have become foundational elements in cultural development (10). Furthermore, research demonstrates that socially responsible leadership reinforces psychological safety, trust, and job satisfaction, thereby strengthening the cultural system (11). These insights highlight that culture is not produced solely through structural decisions; rather, it is shaped through continuous psychological and relational processes.

Organizational culture also plays a critical role in shaping performance outcomes across sectors. For instance, evidence shows that the alignment between cultural values and organizational objectives directly influences employee motivation, collaboration, and efficiency (12). Cultures that emphasize learning, adaptability, and human development enable employees to engage more meaningfully with their roles. In educational organizations, dimensions of culture—such as shared mission,

teamwork, communication, and professional development—are particularly significant in determining organizational effectiveness (10). These dimensions contribute to improved decision-making, enhanced problem-solving capacity, and increased organizational cohesion. This perspective aligns with the view that culture must strategically support both emotional well-being and operational efficiency to achieve sustainable performance in academic and healthcare settings.

In Iran, a growing body of literature emphasizes the importance of developing culturally grounded, psychologically informed, and context-sensitive models of organizational culture. Scholars highlight that cultural frameworks must consider local social norms, professional expectations, and organizational conditions to be effective (13). The cultural context of Iranian academic institutions—particularly those in the medical sciences—presents unique dynamics due to their dual roles in education and public health. These institutions operate under high expectations for quality teaching, research productivity, and service delivery, requiring a stable and supportive organizational culture that enhances psychological well-being and fosters professional commitment. Cultural models that integrate Islamic-Iranian values, psychological principles, and human development strategies are increasingly proposed as a foundation for organizational improvement (14).

Scholars such as Moqimi argue that organizational transformation depends on cultural readiness, psychological empowerment, and strategic clarity (15). In this view, change management requires not only structural reforms but also the cultivation of mental models, shared meaning, and adaptive psychological climates. Cultural transformation within universities, therefore, depends on the alignment between strategic goals, staff development initiatives, and interpersonal communication patterns. Psychological approaches emphasize that cultural change must begin with individual attitudes, emotional competencies, and relational behaviors that collectively shape the organizational identity (16). Thus, understanding organizational culture requires attention to both macro-level strategies and micro-level psychological processes.

In addition to strategic and psychological dimensions, the relational domain of culture—specifically communication, collaboration, and interpersonal trust—is a decisive factor in shaping organizational outcomes. Studies confirm that open communication channels, participatory dialogue, and shared meaning enhance both psychological safety and operational effectiveness (2). When employees feel heard and respected, they are more willing to engage in problem-solving, innovation, and collective action. Communication also facilitates the transfer of tacit knowledge, emotional support, and cultural continuity. Thus, the relational aspect of culture is deeply intertwined with psychological well-being and strategic goal fulfillment.

The significance of organizational culture for employee well-being is further underscored by research linking cultural conditions to stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion (4). In the absence of psychological safety, employees experience heightened stress and decreased performance. In contrast, supportive cultures that emphasize empathy, emotional literacy, and human-centric leadership contribute to reduced stress levels and enhanced psychological resilience. This is particularly important in healthcare and academic environments, where emotional labor is high and professional demands are complex. A psychologically grounded organizational culture thus serves as a protective factor against burnout and supports the sustainable functioning of the workforce.

Moreover, recent interdisciplinary studies integrate social responsibility, psychological safety, and cultural sustainability, suggesting that responsible organizational behavior contributes to long-term cultural coherence and employee commitment (14). Sustainable organizational culture involves aligning ethical principles, human development, and psychological support systems to ensure continuity and resilience. This perspective emphasizes that culture must not only support immediate operational needs, but also foster the long-term psychological, ethical, and professional development of the organization.

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to identify and analyze the strategic organizational culture factors with a psychological approach in Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences.

Methods and Materials

The methodology of this study was designed as a mixed-methods, sequential exploratory approach. In the qualitative phase, a grounded theory approach was used to identify the strategic factors of an effective organizational culture with a psychological approach, and the main data collection tool was semi-structured interviews with experts. The qualitative statistical population consisted of 25 professors and specialists in the fields of organizational culture and organizational psychology, selected through snowball sampling, and ultimately 12 interviews were conducted until theoretical saturation was reached. The interview data were analyzed through three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the quantitative phase, the statistical population consisted of 950 managers and administrative staff at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. Using the Krejcie and Morgan table, a sample size of 274 individuals was calculated and selected through stratified random sampling. The data collection instrument in this phase was a researcher-made questionnaire containing 65 items designed across 6 dimensions and 13 components. For content validity, expert judgment as well as the CVI and CVR indices were used, where values above 0.79 and 0.62 indicated acceptable validity. Construct validity was assessed through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, along with examinations of convergent and discriminant validity. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Accordingly, the final questionnaire was recognized as a valid tool for validating the model of an effective organizational culture with a psychological approach.

Findings and Results

Organizational strategies—particularly within the psychological dimension—play a major role in shaping organizational culture. At Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, the adoption of effective strategies can provide a suitable foundation for the development of an effective, human-centered, and development-oriented culture by enhancing human capital and improving interpersonal interactions.

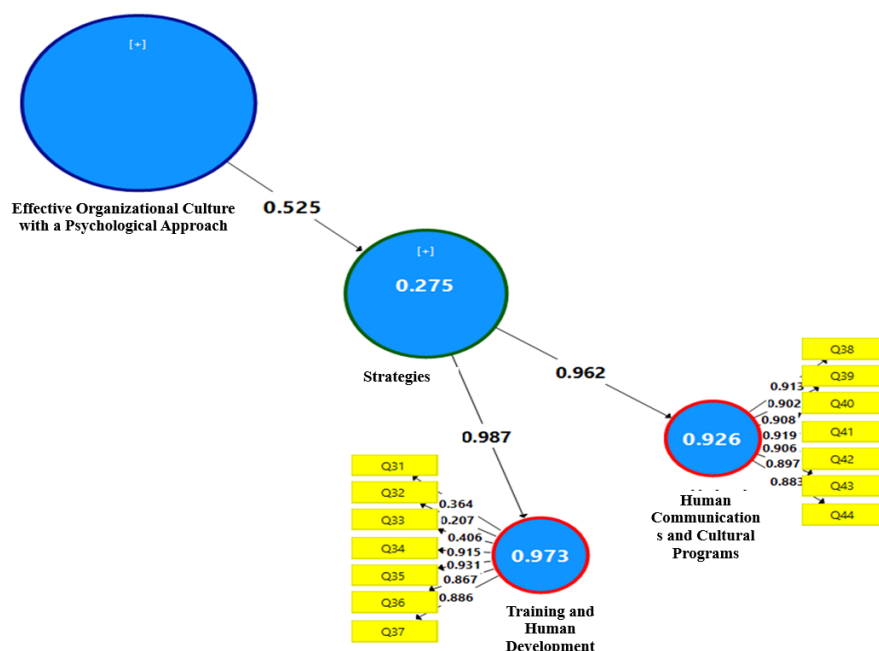


Figure 1. Relationship Between Strategies and an Effective Organizational Culture with a Psychological Approach in the Path Coefficient Estimation Model

The findings of the structural equation modeling indicate that organizational strategies have a significant impact on the formation and enhancement of an effective organizational culture with a psychological approach. A path coefficient of 0.525 and an R^2 value of 0.275 demonstrate that strategies alone can explain approximately 27.5% of the variance in organizational culture; this is considerable and highlights the importance of strategies in designing the organization's cultural system. These strategies can be analyzed in two main components: training and human development, and human communication and cultural programs. First, the very strong relationship between strategies and training and human development, indicated by a path coefficient of 0.987 and $R^2 = 0.973$, reveals that nearly all variations in the training component result from changes in strategies. This means that the development of skills training, psychological development programs, emotional literacy enhancement, and employee professional growth are directly influenced by the organization's strategic policies and approaches. Second, human communication and cultural programs also show high dependence on adopted strategies, with a path coefficient of 0.962 and $R^2 = 0.926$. These indicators demonstrate that the organization's communication policies, dialogue environment, collective participation, empathy, organizational ceremonies, and identity-enhancing programs are strongly influenced by macro-level organizational strategies. When strategies promote positive interactions, empathy, and convergence, organizational culture significantly forms in the direction of psychological well-being, internal cohesion, and productivity. Overall, this analysis shows that strategies—particularly in the two mentioned domains—act as fundamental and primary drivers in creating a desirable organizational culture. Therefore, for cultural transformation in governmental organizations, it is necessary that strategic policy-making be pursued not only with an administrative orientation, but also with psychological and human-centered considerations.

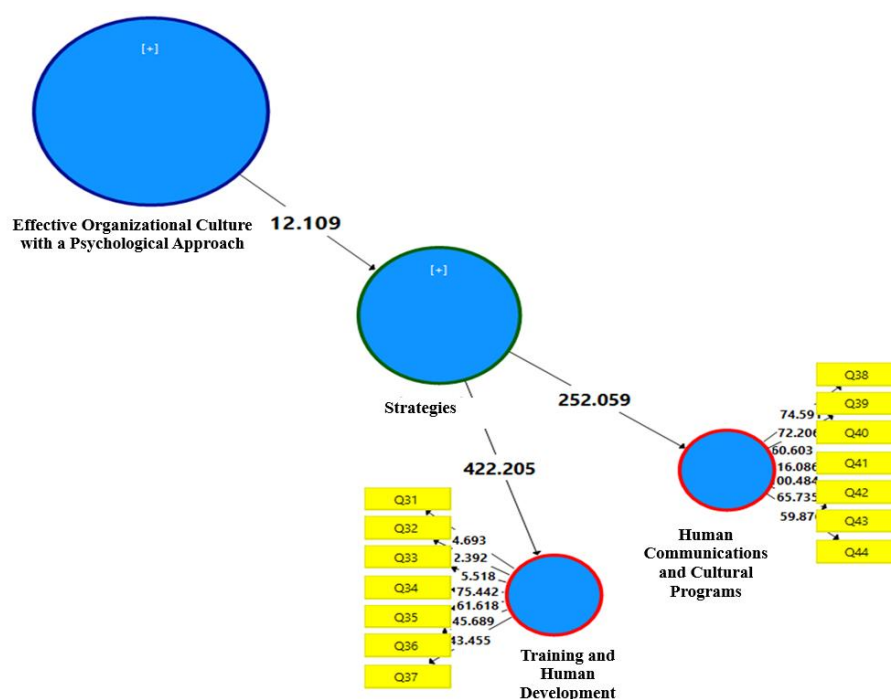


Figure 2. Relationship Between Strategies and an Effective Organizational Culture with a Psychological Approach in the Significance of Path Coefficients Model

The results of the structural equation modeling in the significance state of path coefficients (T-Value) indicate the strong validity of the impact of strategies on the components of an effective organizational culture with a psychological approach at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. A T-value of 12.109 in the path between strategies and an effective organizational culture with a psychological approach exceeds the critical threshold (± 1.96), indicating that this path is statistically significant.

In other words, organizational strategies play a decisive role in forming or enhancing an organizational culture based on psychological principles. Overall, these high significance values demonstrate that organizational strategies—when designed around training, communication, and human development—can directly and strongly guide organizational culture toward psychological effectiveness.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the present study provide a comprehensive picture of how strategic organizational factors shape an effective organizational culture with a psychological approach in Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. The structural equation modeling demonstrated that organizational strategies explain approximately 27.5% of the variance in organizational culture, with particularly strong effects observed in the dimensions of human development, communication, and cultural programming. These findings underscore the critical role of strategically aligned cultural practices in fostering psychological safety, human flourishing, and interpersonal trust within the organization. The strong path coefficients between strategic policies and human development initiatives suggest that employees perceive training, emotional literacy, psychological empowerment, and professional development as the most important levers of an effective culture. This aligns with the broader literature emphasizing that psychological resources—such as resilience, hope, self-efficacy, and optimism—serve as key assets for organizational adaptability and performance (3). In environments where the psychological foundations of culture are strengthened, employees are more likely to engage in innovative behaviors, maintain emotional stability, and contribute actively to organizational goals.

The findings further align with evidence showing that organizational culture is deeply intertwined with psychological well-being, stress regulation, and burnout mitigation (4). In academic and healthcare settings—where employees routinely deal with high cognitive demands and interpersonal stressors—strategic investments in psychological development and emotional support directly contribute to reducing burnout and enhancing job satisfaction. This connection reinforces the argument that culture is not merely a symbolic construct but a psychological environment that shapes how employees cope with pressure, perceive organizational expectations, and assess professional identity. The strong relationship identified in this study between strategy and communication-related cultural factors demonstrates that interpersonal relationships and social interaction patterns are essential in forming a psychologically healthy culture. This is consistent with research highlighting that ethical climate, psychological safety, and transparent communication channels enhance organizational harmony and cooperation (2). When employees feel psychologically safe to express ideas, seek help, and communicate openly, the organization becomes more cohesive and more capable of collective problem-solving.

The role of interpersonal communication observed in the findings mirrors the perspective that organizational culture is fundamentally a relational and cognitive system shaped by shared meanings, expectations, and interactions (1). Effective communication and cultural programs promote a sense of identity, belonging, and emotional connection within employees, reinforcing the psychological dimension of culture. The significant path coefficient linking strategies to interpersonal communication highlights that policies encouraging dialogue, empathy, and collaboration lay the foundation for psychological well-being and social cohesion. This aligns with studies documenting that employees' experience of respect, voice, and mutual understanding within the organization directly enhances psychological safety, job satisfaction, and performance outcomes (11). The present findings therefore indicate that communication is not merely a managerial function but a psychological mechanism through which organizational culture expresses its values and influences behavior.

The results also strongly support previous research on the indispensability of training and human development in cultivating an effective culture. The high explanatory power of strategic policies on human development factors suggests that training

programs, emotional literacy initiatives, and professional development activities serve as essential psychological reinforcers of culture. This aligns with evidence showing that the cultivation of human capital—through skill development, emotional competence, and psychological empowerment—significantly contributes to organizational performance and adaptability (8). When organizations strategically invest in human development, they facilitate not only cognitive growth but also psychological resilience, which is a critical element for institutional stability. Similar findings in Iranian contexts support the notion that training-centered cultural models enhance employees' psychological commitment and organizational alignment, particularly within universities and public institutions (10). The current study reinforces these conclusions by demonstrating quantitatively that human development is the most responsive domain to strategic interventions.

In terms of theoretical alignment, the results resonate with literature emphasizing that culture is an integral part of strategic management and organizational transformation. Scholars argue that sustainable cultural change requires psychological readiness, shared meaning, and strategic coherence across the organization (15). This study supports this perspective by showing that strategies focused on human development and communication significantly affect cultural outcomes. The psychological approach highlighted in this research aligns with perspectives asserting that cultural transformation is driven by cognitive and emotional processes within individuals, which accumulate to form collective organizational behavior (16). The strong impact of strategies on cultural components such as empathy, collaboration, and interpersonal trust further aligns with frameworks proposing that culturally grounded leadership facilitates psychological empowerment and organizational cohesion (9). Leaders have a critical role in translating strategic priorities into psychological experiences for employees, reinforcing norms through supportive behaviors, and creating an environment conducive to well-being. The current findings highlight the importance of leadership's influence on psychologically grounded cultural development, consistent with research demonstrating the role of leadership style in shaping psychological climates and workplace well-being (6).

Moreover, the results underscore the significance of integrating knowledge management perspectives into organizational culture analysis. The link between strategies and communication reflects the critical role of knowledge-sharing, interpersonal trust, and cooperative relationships in sustaining cultural continuity (7). Studies show that organizations with strong cultural support for knowledge exchange experience enhanced innovation, problem-solving capacity, and strategic adaptability. The findings of this study complement such arguments by showing that communication and collaborative cultural practices are essential channels for transmitting shared values and psychological norms. The psychological approach evident in the data reveals that knowledge-sharing is not merely a procedural requirement but also a psychological process relying on trust, confidence, and social belonging.

The current study's findings also align with literature that emphasizes culture as a determinant of organizational performance. The significant influence of strategies on culture supports the argument that cultural systems underpin employee motivation, task commitment, and engagement (12). The emphasis on psychological factors such as empathy, respect, and emotional connection aligns with broader research demonstrating that emotionally supportive cultures promote high levels of employee performance, particularly in service-oriented and educational settings (14). This study strengthens these arguments by demonstrating that psychological dimensions of culture are not secondary or peripheral, but core components shaped directly by organizational strategy. The quantitative evidence showing strong path coefficients adds empirical support to the theoretical frameworks advocating for psychologically grounded cultural models (17). These models emphasize that psychological mechanisms are essential to sustaining collective motivation, innovation, and professional ethics. The results resonate with studies suggesting that organizational culture is a multi-level construct involving cognitive, emotional, and relational dimensions that collectively contribute to organizational performance (18). By demonstrating that strategies can profoundly

influence these dimensions, the study contributes to the broader understanding of culture as a strategic and psychological system rather than a static set of norms.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce interpretations in the Iranian literature proposing that organizational culture should be culturally contextualized, psychologically grounded, and aligned with institutional missions (13). In the context of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, where clinical, academic, and administrative activities intersect, a psychologically oriented culture is particularly important for sustaining employee well-being, service quality, and organizational stability. The results of this study provide empirical validation for these theoretical perspectives and highlight the need for continuous cultural refinement based on strategic planning and psychological development.

Despite the strengths of these findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted within a single university of medical sciences, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other organizational settings. The use of self-reported questionnaires may have introduced response biases, particularly in culturally sensitive topics such as communication quality and psychological safety. The cross-sectional design of the quantitative phase restricts the ability to infer long-term causal relationships between strategies and cultural outcomes. Furthermore, although the qualitative phase reached theoretical saturation, the sample size was still limited to a specific subset of experts, which may not fully represent diverse perspectives within broader organizational contexts.

Future research should consider expanding the study to multiple universities and healthcare institutions to enhance generalizability and comparative insight. Longitudinal designs could be employed to examine how cultural changes evolve over time in response to strategic interventions. Future studies may also benefit from integrating observational methods, behavioral assessments, or multi-source evaluations to reduce reliance on self-report data. Additionally, researchers could explore the mediating roles of psychological capital, emotional intelligence, or leadership style in the relationship between strategy and culture, offering deeper insights into the psychological mechanisms underpinning cultural transformation.

In practice, organizations should prioritize human development initiatives, emphasizing emotional literacy, psychological training, and professional growth. Leaders should cultivate open communication environments that encourage dialogue, empathy, and collaborative problem-solving. Strategic policies should integrate psychological principles into planning processes to ensure that cultural development aligns with employee well-being and organizational goals.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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