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Qualitative Analysis of Family's Structure and Practices in Shaping Higher Education and Career Choices of Male Academics in Public Universities of KP, Pakistan

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Abstract

This study explores the unheard experiences of male academics in higher education institutions of Pakistan, particularly in the public sector universities of Kyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). While there has been substantial research on female academics, the role of socio-economic and familial contexts in shaping the careers of male academics remain under-researched. Using qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 lecturers and assistant professors from KP's public universities. Thematic analysis revealed that the majority of participants were first-generation scholars, highlighting the significant role of family support in overcoming socio-economic challenges. For some, privileged family backgrounds provided inspiration and guidance. Despite barriers related to family and regional disparities, persistent encouragement from families played a pivotal role in academic and career success. This qualitative study contributes to global literature by shedding light on the unique experiences of male academics in an under-explored context. The findings offer insights for future policy interventions to address educational inequalities and supporting first-generation scholars.

Keywords: male academics, family socio-economic background, higher education, career trajectories, educational inequalities, qualitative research, family influence

Introduction

The effect of familial expectations, support, and socio-cultural standards is critical in deciding the trajectory of ones life, particularly with regard to education and employment, in cultures where families play a significant role in molding individual goals. In Pakistan, especially in a traditional and culturally rich province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), families are the primary decision-making entity Kadir et al. (2003). Consequently, families

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play a major role in determining both the educational and career pathways of their members. For male academics in KP, the effects are especially strong; as traditional norms often determine their status as primary earners and decision makers. In order to understand how these family dynamics shape the choices and outcomes of male faculty members, it is necessary to study the broader aspects such as educational attainment and career scope in academia. These relationships are deeply studied in this research to uncover the role of family practices as a social institution in shaping the career trajectories of academicians in universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Factors Influencing Career Choices

According to Jan (2023), two core factors are crucial in influencing educational and career outcomes, family expectations and socio-economic conditions. These factors influence the educational and career choices for both male and female academics in KP. Similarly, Zeb et al. (2020) also mentioned family expectations and socio-economic status along with selfpersonality. Particularly, the role of elder brother has been more influential in shaping the decision of both his younger brothers and sisters right from the very beginning. Petesch et al. (2022) findings also unearthed that the elder members of the family have dominant role and position at home as well as in the community, where they significantly influence the decisions available to young people, especially when it comes to choosing their careers. This reflects how societal norms and extended families have an influence on new generations' career trajectories. Similarly, Humayon et al. (2018) found that undergraduate students job decisions are largely influenced by their parents. This coincides to the view that family expectations and norms, particularly in traditional cultures like KP. In KP, the familial engagement is typically vital to core life decisions and hold the most important role in influencing the educational and professional directions of coming generation.

Taking inspiration from parents is commonly practiced in Pakistani families. Haque (2005) discovered that the youngsters, in almost each family who were part of his study, were found to be inspired by their parental goals. This shows how parental desires can influence the youngsters' job goals, especially for young men growing up in the culturally strong environments like KP where parents frequently pave the ways for their childrens education and professional paths. Not only in the career path

but even the spouse selection is strongly influenced by parents, particularly in KP. Mushtaq et al. (2021) emphasized how important parents still are in Pakistani society when choosing a mate, with consanguineous marriages being strongly preferred because of their social, cultural, and economic significance. This coincides with the traditional family structure found in KP, where parental influence remains essential in making major life decisions, particularly those related to marriage, education, and employment.

The Cultural Context and Decision Making

The cultural environment is greatly influenced by the traditional beliefs, social mores, and practices of KP (Wiqas & Ahmed, 2022), a region of Pakistan. There are considerable issues regarding gender sensitivity in these circumstances because womens freedom and opportunities are severely limited. Mobility, educational opportunities, and civic engagement are frequently restricted for women, which perpetuates inequalities in decision-making and resource access.

The Educational Context

In the past, there have been significant gender differences in KPK enrolment and access to higher education. Men too encountered numerous barriers that prevented them from enrolling in higher education, such as culturally set expectations, socioeconomic hinderances, and security threats. The clashes have, however, been addressed by a number of researchers that support gender parity and encourage both male and female enrolment in higher education. According to Ali and Zeb (2018), KP has long struggled with security issues, which have severely impacted the regions' education, particularly, the higher-level academia. Threats from extremist groups have hindered academic activities, limited students' mobility, and even prevented students from attending their educational institutions. In addition to security challenges, numerous reports highlight the poor quality of education in KP universities, mainly due to unavailability of staff, and faculty, and the proper infrastructures (Khan et al., 2022). Though there have been several amendments taken to uplift the educational standards and bring them to the level of regional, national, and international standards (Hussain & Khan, 2020). In KP, access to higher education is significantly different on regional level. Universities in large cities like Peshawar are generally better equipped than those in more rural locations,

which has resulted in uneven educational quality and performance in the whole province (Khattak & Iqbal, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Male academicians' professional choices and career pathways are highly influenced by familial interreference, particularly in culturally rich regions like KP. Families continue to have a significant impact on decisions about higher education and career paths, even in the face of shifting social dynamics and a growing emphasis on individual goals. However, scant research has addressed the subtle interaction between family expectations, societal norms, and the career achievements of male professors in public institutions in KP. In order to close this knowledge gap, this study will qualitatively examine the ways in which different family structures and practices affect the career decisions and outcomes of higher education made by male academics. This will provide a thorough grasp of the relationship between familial influence and professional development in this context. Hence, this study as aimed at following objectives:

- 1. To assess the positive and negative influences of family structure and socioeconomic status on the career trajectories and educational roadmaps of male academicians in universities of KP.
- 2. To examine the challenges, struggles, educational inequalities, and familial roles in the academic success of male academics in the universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Theoretical Lens

Gramscis idea of hegemony provides a unique lens to assess the familial influence on important decisions of academicians' career pathways. According to Mouffe (2014), Gramsci's notion of hegemony refers to the supremacy of one groups values and views over those of another, influencing their viewpoints through social customs and cultural standards. In the context of this study, "family hegemony" describes how deeply ingrained cultural norms and familial expectations, often invisible but powerful desires, shape people into socially acceptable paths. This familial dominance is critical in influencing the career and higher education decisions of male academics in culturally embedded society of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Another supporting viewpoint is presented by Max Webers social action theory, which points towards the role that human agency plays within the framework of social norms. Thus, to Weber, people behave in ways that are determined by the meanings they assign to their external settings - the societal standards set by social norms and cultural values (Nickerson, n.d.). Webers paradigm is used in this study to dig out how the male academicians perceive, and react to the social facts in the form of familial expectations and influence.

Together, these theoretical perspectives—Gramscis theory of hegemony and Weber's social action theory provide the framework that allow an exploration of the interplay between family-driven societal expectations (as per Gramsci) and individual action and interpretation (as per Weber). This provides a comprehensive view of how family structure and practices influence the educational and career trajectories of male academics in KP.

Literature Review

Despite the significant body of research focusing on the problems, and limitations faced by females, there is a noticeable gap in studies addressing the cultural, economic, and gender-based barriers experienced by males in academia. Commonly, male-specific problems like social pressure to fit into masculine roles, mental stress, and familial influence are less commonly focused in researches. This review of the literature will draw attention towards those disparities and clear more focus on investigation into the difficulties faced by male academicians in higher education.

Familial Influence in Career Decision Making

Familial interference plays a vital role in shaping the career paths chosen by the youngsters. Asghar and Ajmal (2022) highlighted how family and society shape career aspirations, particularly for male academics in KP where socioeconomic status and familial desires are influential. Career choices are influenced by a several factors like family, environment, personality, and work preferences. Among all these factors, the fathers occupation has a particularly significant impact (Sarwar & Azmat, 2013). In this way, professional career choices are assigned to the youngsters in Pakistani families.

When it comes to choosing a career in Pakistan, the youngsters have to consider both the family expectations as well as personal interests. Mostly



they have to sacrifice their personal interests due to pressure from family expectations which must be understood to realize how male academics manage and face these barriers. As obvious from study by Arif et al. (2019), there are several factors which credit career choices of youngster in Pakistan. These include but not limited to peer pressure, family desires, academic assistance, and societal priorities. In same context, Ali et al. (2017) focused on the intervention of social values when it comes to opt career trajectories, which include professional, familial, and other role models. This is in line with our research by surfacing the wider effects of external social standards. Humayon et al. (2018) also found that familial interference, personal choices, and economic pressures all have a major influence on selecting a career. These studies uncover the ways in which these elements together target Pakistani academicians' employment choices.

Family and Peer Influence

When it comes to take an important decision, particularly in case of youngsters, peers are of no exemption to interfere and influence the opinion. People commonly follow their peers throughout the decision process for approval, help, and adherence to social standards. Apparently, this occurs in most cases and clearly stronger than that of parental influence, and extends to lifestyle opinions, professional choices, and academic careers. Khan and Rehman (2018), who noted a strong correlation between confusion in career decision, and teenagers' mental stress occurrences. Peer and parental pressures have a significant effect on vital decisions. They drew attention to the mental pressure that students go through while taking important decisions, and encourage career counseling sessions as a way to ease that load and assist them in making critical choices. Peer pressure is a key factor in developing attitudes and decisions because it is backed by the desire for social acceptability, and sense of belongingness.

However, Naz et al. (2014) findings were in contrast to previous studies. She found that although peers have a significant impact on professional and personal development, and decision-making process, a childs parents still have the most influence over their conduct. Her findings were supported by Nawaz and Gilani (2011), who added that peer and parental attachment have a higher impact on career-related decisions, with parental influence being comparatively stronger. This trend is found globally and is not exclusive to Pakistani academicians only. For instance, Mtemeri (2020) discovered that

in Zimbabwe, the influence of social pressure on university students career choices was not mainly through peer guidance, and suggestions. Students frequently avoided deliberately looking for peer approval for their professional career decisions.

Role of Socio-Economic Status in Educational Attainment

To bring structural improvements in governance, and quality control systems, the Pakistani government has focused on higher education since the last 20 years. Fair access to higher education for all is possible through increase in chances for socioeconomic growth. With regard to regional inequities in socioeconomic position, and educational opportunities, our study aims to uncover the extent to which recent reforms in higher education have changed the level of equal access. Ironically, studies reflect that the system has failed to provide all the students equal access to higher education despite of these efforts in last 20 years (Rind & Malin, 2024). In their study, many parents portrayed a strong dedication to their youngsters' higher education despite socioeconomic gaps. To understand the factors which affect educational and professional futures, one must have a solid understanding of this imbalance between socioeconomic status and access to higher education. According to Vellymalay (2012), parents who had lower educational level themselves, were less aware of their children's value regarding access to higher education. These studies demonstrate the impact of education and financial status on parental understanding in academic and professional careers.

The studies reflect that lower the socioeconomic status, lessens the chances of tendencies of people towards higher education and vice versa in developing nations. As Batool and Liu (2021) supported this notion through their research that students priorities for higher education are greatly dependent upon level of their parents' socioeconomic statuses. They discovered that socioeconomic variables, such as government spending and the unemployment rate, have a big influence on how many students enroll in postsecondary education. These obstacles make it more difficult for students to access educational opportunities. Amjad et al. (2015) also discovered that demographic factors like housing type, and communication facilities, and school distance all improved student achievement. Student performance was significantly predicted by economic factors, including parental income, food expenditures in the home, the condition of the dwelling, and the availability of utilities like gas and electricity.

Family aspiration has key role in attaining higher education for young family members. Islam and Chakrabarty (2020) looked into the connection between students academic motivation and achievement and familial characteristics, including parental education, parental occupation, family type, monthly household income, and sibling achievement. They found that all familial factors—aside from family type—had a substantial impact on students motivation and performance in school. Furthermore, a positive association was found between academic achievement and motivation, meaning that as students motivation rose, so did their academic performance. In Pakistan, choosing a career is seen as a crucial choice that has a big impact on a persons social standing. The results showed that many variables, such as age, religion, area of residence, living arrangement during school, parents educational background, and parent occupation, have a beneficial influence on students career decisions (Jamim et al., 2022). Apart from above mentioned factors, Naushad (2020) mentioned emotional strength, mental stress, and academic success which according to her findings, are strongly linked to the family's socio-economic status, thus shaping careers of their youngsters accordingly.

After reviewing the literature available on academia, both at national and global levels, it is now clear that there is a vast literature on female-related issues and other concerns in Pakistan. However, literature seems to be much hollow both qualitatively and quantitatively. In particular, the literature is fully blank regarding role of educational inequalities, familial expectations and inspirations, and socioeconomic status in shaping the career trajectories of male academics in Pakistan. This gap reinforces the need to cover these aspects of academia with a particular focus on male academicians. Filling out these loopholes will create balanced research on educational inequalities in academia.

Methodology

Qualitative research design is the best method to understand the complex and comprehensive topics (Mcleod, 2023). Particularly, for examining life experiences, the qualitative design of study provides deeper insights. Since this study is also based on career trajectories and experiences of male academics, a qualitative study design was selected for it. To sample the study participants, purposive sampling technique was used which surfaced up twelve male academicians from four public universities, ranging in rank from lecturers to assistant professors, to explore their experiences on career

choices landing them finally into academia. An interview guide was developed to keep us on guided while conducting one-on-one interviews in calm ambiance to allow academicians open communication and deep discussion. Observing the ethical considerations, a consent form with ethical guidelines was signed by each academician before starting the interviews. The thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2015) was used to analyze the data gathered from the interviews. Socioeconomic status (SES) of academics was measure qualitatively through academicians' lived experiences, access to higher education, and family backgrounds while analyzing the collected data. This required reviewing the transcripts several times, coding them initially to find trends, and then honing the codes into broad themes. In the end, three main themes surfaced, which helped to produce insightful findings and conclusions about the professional pathways taken by male academics in KP.

Findings

Socio-Economic and Socio-Demographic Data of Participants

The objective of this study was to examine the socio-economic and socio-demographic attributes of the participants, as these factors significantly influence their academic experiences and results. The academicians repeatedly linked their career roadmap to their parent's education. The socioeconomic status of academics was inductively determined through their parent's education, family background, and access to higher education.

Table 1Socio-Economic and Socio-Demographic Data of Participants

	Family	Qualification		Occupation	
	Type	Father	Mother	Father	Mother
R1	Joint	PhD	Middle	Retired	House Wife
R2	Semi-Joint	Middle	None	Retired	House Wife
R3	Joint	PhD	None	Retired	House Wife
R4	Joint	Masers	Matric	Retired	Retired
R5	Joint	Matric	None	Retired	House Wife
R6	Nuclear	None	None	Retired	House Wife
R7	Joint	None	None	Retired	House Wife
R8	Joint	Middle	None	Retired	House Wife

	Family	Qualification		Occupation	
	Type	Father	Mother	Father	Mother
R9	Joint	None	Matric	-	House Wife
R10	Joint	Matric	Matric	Retired	House Wife
R11	Nuclear	None	None	Retired	-
R12	Joint	Masters	None	Retired	House Wife

Educational Effect

In line with the idea that educational capital is passed down from one generation to the next, academicians whose dads had advanced degrees, such as PhDs (R1, R3), were more likely to have a positive effect and guidance towards pursuing higher education.

Limited Impact of Mothers Education

Since the majority of mothers are housewives with little to no formal education, their impact on educational success of their children may have been indirect, most often through moral or emotional support rather than job or academic advice.

Traditional Family Roles

A traditional family structure, in which mothers were expected to provide care and nurturing and fathers to provide financial assistance, is indicated by the most housewives and retired fathers.

Family - A Source of Inspiration

Thematic analysis has uncovered that most of the interviewees were the first in their families to enter university for higher education and then join the professional careers of academia. All these first-generation scholars' narratives/accounts highlighted how their deprived family background circumstances (parental lower level of education, and rural residence) paved the paths for various kinds of their family's emotional, social, and economic support for their higher education and career attainments. In the case of a small number of interviewees, socio-economically privileged background, and family norms were the source of inspiration, support, and guidance for gaining higher education and career establishment.

As mentioned by Sjaastad (2012), the significant persons in the family play a core role in inspiring the young ones' choice of higher education. Similarly, in this study the academicians emphasized how their older

brothers and other family members inspired them to pursue further education by providing support. They opted academia despite the rest of their family tended towards more conventional careers, such as, civil services, enlisting in the military, and other fields. As mentioned by R5,

I was the first person in my family to reach the inter level. My elder brother encouraged and supported me more to go for higher education. The rest of my family either started their own businesses after matriculation or joined the armed forces as soldiers.

The experience shared by academicians reflects how family members may serve as inspiration and provide support, particularly the parents/family recognize their child's capabilities. In the same context, R7 added that "My elder brother is involved in academia, and he served as my biggest inspiration for choosing this path." The fact that his father was a scholar emphasizes how much of an impact parents have on forming their children's future goals. According to R1, "My father was an academic. He had a PhD in Economics." Here again we witness how parents who achieve academic success can inspire their children to pursue academia and strive for success in similar vein. This emphasizes the findings by Ali et al. (2017) that the value of having a role model in the family by showing how the accomplishments and commitment of family members in particular professions might encourage others to pursue comparable careers.

Applying Gramsci's lens of hegemony is obvious from these findings about family's crucial role in shaping the educational aspirations and career choices of their youngsters. These statements also support Sarwar and Azmat (2013) results that family and parents' profession influence youngster in choosing academic career. As R12 indicated, "Ill give credit to my father, who was from academia himself. This thing clicked in my fathers mind. Apart from that, my mother was also very conscious about my studies." Hence, here Weber's theory of social facts comes into play. As we saw all the social facts, whether it is the direct encouragement of siblings, the inspiration drawn from parents professions, or the overall family environment, each experience shared by academicians underscores the idea that family is a primary source of motivation and inspiration in pursuing academic goals.

Socio-Economic Barriers and Family Support

Some academicians' remarks draw attention to the financial difficulties that people from middle-class families encounter and stresses the value of family support and self-motivation in overcoming those difficulties. Because of the familys support, they were able to continue with their academic career in spite of their financial limits. As R10 shared,

I faced financial crises due to belonging to a middle-class family. Dealing with financial issues while continuing my educational journey was challenging... my own passion for education, combined with the support of my family, inspired me to pursue higher education. My family consistently encouraged me to pursue further studies.

This clearly supports Vellymalay's (2012) findings about how the parents, despite of socio-economic constraints, support their children in attaining higher education. Some of them emphasized how much of influence financial limitations have on professional choices. The academicians desire to take competitive tests was thwarted by their unstable financial situation. According to R5,

I wanted to go for CSS and/or PMS (Competitive exams). Since the family was not financially stable enough to take a break and prepare for these exams.....whether I would have passed or not is another matter, but at least I should have given it a try.

This emphasizes the socioeconomic obstacles that frequently prevent people from taking use of opportunities to the fullest extent possible, notwithstanding their goals.

Early career uncertainty was caused by the absence of career direction in the family. But the academicians found their enthusiasm for their topic of interest after they identified it. The academician R4 shared, "I had no interest in medicine or engineering because I didnt have anyone to guide me about my career... after being admitted at university, I realized that this was the field I wanted to pursue and was passionate about." This reflects how a familys help in managing these difficulties can ultimately lead to a meaningful academic and career journey as added by Fomby and Kravitz-Wirtz (2019). A lack of career guidance, which is frequently linked to socioeconomic position and educational background, can cause confusion in job choices.



These narrations from academicians highlight and create strong link to the findings by Asghar and Ajmal (2022) who found that socio-economic conditions in KP limits the educational attainment increases hinderances. These findings indicate the difficulties brought on by socioeconomic constraints, including unstable finances and a lack of career direction.

Unprivileged Family and Lack of Guidance

The statements by academicians illustrate how monetary limitations can prevent people from pursuing lofty objectives as discovered by Qasim et al. (2023) in Quetta, Balochistan. The necessity for financial stability ultimately impeded R5s ability to completely explore professional choices, which in turn limited their motivation to study for competitive tests. As indicated in the statement by academician R5, "I wanted to go for CSS and/or PMS (Competitive exams in Pakistan). But the family was not financially stable enough to take a break and prepare for these exams."

According to R4, "I had no interest in medicine or engineering because I didnt have anyone to guide me about my career... after being admitted at university, I realized that this was the field I wanted to pursue and was passionate about." This highlights how the absence of appropriate career counseling can lead to uncertainty and initially misguided career decisions. As Gramsci indicated in his work, there were some hegemonic fields like medicine and engineering set as societal standards. The academicians desire to opt those conventional fields was partly due to insufficient guidance, and mostly because they perceived the medical and engineering fields- the social facts in Weber's terms- as the social standards and set their preferences accordingly.

Conclusion

This study has mainly focused the male academicians' career pathways and how the families' structures influence and steer their career trajectories in universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. After examining the impacts of family structure, socioeconomic restrictions, and familial support, the results unearthed how family dynamics can both support and discourage their youngsters' plans for their education and careers. As per academicians' experiences, some families were quite supportive regarding their decision to ace higher education and academic professions. Such as, an academician revealed that he was the first one in the family to enter the high school level. And it was all possible due to his elder brother's financial and moral support. In similar vein, an academician also highlighted that he was motivated to pursue a similar career path by his brothers academic achievements. Such experiences reflect that how family support may establish a supportive environment that encourages educational aspirations, surfacing the encouraging influence that family members have on their youngsters' professional choices. As Gramsci's theory of hegemony emphasizes, these outcomes follow Gramsci's hegemonic power like educated family members who excelled academically ignited interest and driven their youngsters for additional study and academic careers. These familial influences can counter the scenarios of low educational attainment in situations where traditional family roles usually discourage further education. Sometimes, family members become role models in the family and academic achievement becomes an aspirational goal, which increases their attraction towards higher education and widens the self-perception of what they are capable of.

This study also explored the ways in which financial constraints hindered the career pathways of the academicians. For instance, an academician explained how financial restraints can deprive them from selfrealization about their academic and professional capabilities by making it nearly impossible to prepare for their desired professional exams. They are limited to opt any white-collar job after holding a degree and start earning for their living. The upward social mobility is accompanied by better financial status and in this study, it is clear that most of academicians faced strongest repulsion while struggling for upward mobility due to socioeconomic constraints. Apart from financial obstacles faced, the male academicians also experienced a lack of proper career guidance. Most academicians have been deprived of career counseling as they were the first one to enter higher education. The academicians shared their experiences about how uncertain they were about choosing a career as there was no one to assist them properly. They were not only lacking knowledge and guidance on career but also were influenced by societal pressure and trends in selecting the career. Most academicians shared that they tended towards dominant fields like engineering, and medical fields because these were the most known fields and trending on top due to scope in job-market.

Despite financial limitation, many academicians appreciated the role of their families in supporting them to pursue their dreams and goals. Families, particularly the joint families played a crucial role in assisting the academicians to focus on their goal while the responsibilities and finances were managed by elderlies of the family. Family not only provided financial assistance but also provided the emotional support as well as backed them up in dividing the domestic responsibilities. In a crux, family has greater influence in shaping the career trajectories of the male academicians. Academicians have to follow their expectations and bypass their own choices. But on the other hand, families have a supporting role as well. Despite financial issues, family's elderly encourage them to chase their dreams fearlessly as the elderlies will cover their educational expenses. This sociological approach uncovers the complex relationship between the family's role, both as assistive, and as well as limiting. On one hand financial constraints, lack of guidance, limited resources, familial expectations, and coercion deprive the male academicians but on other hand, the aspects like emotional and motivational support, encourage them. This delicate interrelationship between family's both encouraging and limiting roles is essential to understand how male academicians' career choices are influenced and shaped, particularly in a culturally rich province, KP, in Pakistan.

Policy and Practice Implications

Based on the outcomes of this study, the following policies and initiatives are recommended

Financial Assistance Policies

Since the lower and even middle-class families have no proper resources to promote equal access to higher education.

Career Counseling Programs

Mostly the students follow the dominant trends in the society as obvious from this study as well. There should be seminars and workshops on career counselling to keep the students updated.

Institutional Policies

Institutional policies should be based on realizing the complex interrelationship between both the family dynamics and the career choices of higher education students.

Class-Based Research

This study provides a base for further research on effects of family's socio-economic status on educational attainment, and career choices.

Theme-Based Research

Different aspects which were not touched earlier are under focus in this study such as mental-stress, career choices, and family dynamics. These aspects provide strong base and are essential to be studied in more detail.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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