


The Effect of Organizational Silence on Burnout: A Meta-Analysis Approach¹

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Abstract

This study was conducted by meta-analysis method to examine the effect of organisational silence on burnout. In the study, 3111 studies were accessed as a result of searching the 'OpenAlex' and 'scholar.google' databases with the keywords 'silence' and 'burnout' in the period covering the years 2020-2025. The 15 studies that met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were analysed with a total sample size of 3869. The analyses were performed using CMA 3.0 (Comprehensive Meta Analysis 3.0) software. Q and I^2 test results showed that there was a high level of variance (heterogeneity) among the analysed studies ($Q = 488.70$, $I^2 = 97.13$). Therefore, meta-analysis was performed using a random effect model. According to the findings, it was determined that there was a positive and significant relationship between organisational silence and burnout ($r = 0.635$, $p < 0.05$). In the analyses performed with Fisher's Z transformation, it was seen that confidence intervals supported this relationship. Egger's test, Duval and Tweedie's cut and add test, Begg and Mazumdar rank correlation were used for bias analysis and it was concluded that there was no publication bias. Funnel Plot analyses also show that the risk of bias is low.

Keywords: Organizational silence, burnout, meta-analysis.

Örgütsel Sessizliğin Tükenmişlik Üzerindeki Etkisi: Bir Meta Analiz Yaklaşımı

Öz

Bu çalışma, örgütsel sessizliğin tükenmişlik üzerindeki etkisini incelemek amacıyla meta-analiz yöntemiyle gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışmada, "OpenAlex" ve "scholar.google" veri tabanlarında 2020-2025 yıllarını kapsayan dönemde "silence" ve "burnout" anahtar kelimeleriyle yapılan taramalar sonucunda 3111 çalışmaya ulaşılmıştır. Belirlenen dahil etme ve hariç tutma kriterlerine uygun 15 çalışma, toplam 3869 örneklem ile analiz edilmiştir. Analizler, CMA 3.0 (Comprehensive Meta Analysis 3.0) yazılımı kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Q ve I^2 test sonuçları, incelenen çalışmalar arasında yüksek düzeyde varyans (heterojenlik) olduğunu göstermiştir ($Q = 488,70$, $I^2 = 97,13$). Bu nedenle, rassal etkili model kullanılarak meta-analiz gerçekleştirilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgulara göre örgütsel sessizlik ile tükenmişlik arasında pozitif yönlü ve anlamlı bir ilişki olduğu tespit edilmiştir ($r = 0,635$, $p < 0,05$). Fisher's Z dönüşümü ile yapılan analizlerde, güven aralıklarının bu ilişkiyi desteklediği görülmüştür. Yanlılık analizi için Egger testi, Duval ve Tweedie'nin kes ve ekle testi, Begg ve Mazumdar sıralama korelasyonu gibi yöntemlerden yararlanılmış ve yayın yanlılığının olmadığı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Funnel Plot analizleri de yanlılık riskinin düşük olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Örgütsel sessizlik, tükenmişlik, meta analiz.

Atıf / Cite this Article: Akdemir Ömür, G., Çitli, İ. İ., Öztirak, M., Çiçeklioğlu, H. & Yazıcı, A. M. (2025). The effect of organizational silence on burnout: A meta-analysis approach, *Journal of Organizational Behavior Review*, 7(2), 157-170.

¹ This study was presented at the 24th International Business Congress held between 8-10 May 2025.

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1. Introduction

In today's work environments, organizational silence and burnout are among the important factors affecting employee productivity and job satisfaction. Burnout is a syndrome that occurs as a result of individuals being exposed to long-term stress and pressure, characterized by emotional exhaustion, desensitization, and a decrease in the sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 1997). In particular, intense work tempo and excessive workload cause employees to experience burnout and, as a result, physical, psychological, and professional negativities. When the literature is examined, there are empirical findings that burnout has negative effects on physical health (heart diseases, musculoskeletal pain, chronic fatigue, headache) (Salvagioni et al., 2017), can lead to structural and functional changes in the brain, cause irregularities in cortisol levels and increased inflammation (Bayes et al., 2021), can trigger mental health problems such as depression and anxiety (Koutsimani et al., 2019), and also leads to organizational outcomes such as decreased performance and increased absenteeism (Salvagioni et al., 2017). Organizational silence is defined as individuals avoiding expressing their thoughts, concerns, or feedback for various reasons (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). It is known that organizational silence has negative effects on error detection, organizational learning, and effectiveness in institutions (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005). In addition, it has been associated with important variables for the organization, such as employee productivity, organizational commitment, and intention to leave (Yağar & Dökme Yağar, 2023). Many studies examining the relationship between organizational silence and burnout reveal that there is a positive relationship between these two variables (Akin & Ulusoy, 2016; Al-Rousan & Omoush, 2018; Haraisa, 2021; Harmanci Seren et al., 2018; Knoll et al., 2019). One of the main determinants of this relationship is the stress level. Morrison & Milliken (2000) suggest that employees' stress levels increase over time when they remain silent. At the same time, considering that stress is one of the most important causes of burnout, it can be concluded that organizational silence is an important antecedent that triggers burnout.

Although there are several individual studies in the literature examining the impact of organizational silence on burnout, most of these studies are limited to specific sectors or countries, and there is no comprehensive meta-analysis that statistically combines the findings across studies. The lack of a meta-analytic synthesis makes it difficult to draw generalizable conclusions about the strength and consistency of the relationship between organizational silence and burnout. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by conducting

a comprehensive meta-analysis to systematically evaluate the impact of organizational silence on burnout and provide a holistic perspective supported by quantitative evidence.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. *Burnout Syndrome*

Maslach & Jackson (1981) define burnout as the physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion of an individual due to prolonged work stress and pressure. The authors define burnout as consisting of three basic dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is the loss of energy and decreased motivation for work by an individual due to constant stress. Depersonalization is the employee's loss of interest in the work environment and colleagues, loss of empathy, and weakening of the emotional bond to the job. The decrease in personal accomplishment is associated with the individual developing a negative perception of work performance, loss of sense of competence, and dissatisfaction with the job.

The effects of burnout have been widely studied at the individual and organizational levels. At the individual level, burnout is associated with various physical and mental health problems such as chronic fatigue, sleep disorders, anxiety, depression, and decreased cognitive functions. It can seriously reduce the individual's overall quality of life (Faisal et al., 2024). At the organizational level, high levels of burnout reduce job satisfaction and organizational commitment, leading to a toxic work environment characterized by low morale and high employee turnover (Demir, 2009; Kang, 2019). Especially in the health, education, and service sectors, burnout directly affects not only the well-being of employees but also the quality of service provided (Ainger et al., 2024; Scheepers et al., 2023). From an economic perspective, burnout results in additional costs such as increased recruitment and training costs due to turnover, poor performance, and loss of productivity (Nonnis et al., 2023).

2.2. *Organizational Silence*

Organizational silence is defined as a collective phenomenon in which employees avoid sharing their ideas, concerns, or observations for various reasons (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Pinder & Harlos (2001) explain organizational silence as individuals avoiding communicating their emotional, cognitive, and behavioral views about events within the organization to authorized persons. This silence is affected by the organizational structure and leadership approach, as well as the personal preferences of individuals. The

tendency of employees to remain silent increases especially in environments where feedback mechanisms are weak or where a punitive management approach prevails.

Dyne et al. (2003) examined silence in three dimensions: acquiescent silence, where employees remain passive because they think their ideas will not be taken into consideration; defensive silence, where individuals remain silent in order to protect their own positions; and prosocial silence, where individuals avoid sharing information in order to protect the organization or their colleagues. Knoll et al. (2019) added the concept of opportunistic silence and suggested that individuals may consciously remain silent to gain personal benefit or advantage. It is observed that employees prefer not to share valuable information, especially in environments where competition is high.

Individual, organizational, and cultural factors play a role in the emergence of organizational silence. At the individual level, personality traits, lack of self-confidence, and risk perception can increase the tendency to remain silent (Detert & Burris, 2007). At the organizational level, authoritarian leadership, low organizational justice and inadequate communication mechanisms can cause employees to remain silent (Edmondson, 1999; Wang & Hsieh, 2013).

3. Method

The effect of organizational silence on burnout can occur both directly and through other psychological phenomena. Employees' silence can increase emotional exhaustion as it creates a sense of helplessness and loss of control in the workplace (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). Especially in organizations where leadership support is lacking, as the culture of silence becomes widespread, employees feel more emotionally pressured (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005). Organizational silence triggers burnout by creating a lack of psychological safety not only at the individual level but also at the organizational level (Edmondson, 1999). Studies show that emotional exhaustion and desensitization are higher in workplaces where employees do not trust management and are reluctant to voice their opinions (Haraisa, 2021). When employees consistently avoid giving feedback, they feel they are losing their influence over work processes, which can result in decreased personal accomplishment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

3.1. Data Analysis

The analyses of the study were carried out with CMA 3.0 software. In order to determine the effect of innovation and flexibility capacity on sustainability, the evaluation

was made according to the results of the pooled correlation coefficient and Fisher's Z transformation, Z statistics, and p values. The significance level in the analyses was accepted as 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). Q and I^2 statistics are used to decide which fixed effect or random models to use by testing homogeneity. Heterogeneity was decided by considering that the Q statistic was greater than the degree of freedom and the I^2 statistic was >75 (CMA, 2024a: 116). Q and I^2 statistics were used only and solely to determine the heterogeneity situation (CMA, 2024a: 80). In the bias analysis of the obtained results, Egger's regression intercept, Duval and Tweedie's cut and add test, Begg and Mazumdar rank correlation, Rosenthal's classic missing-safe N and Orwin's missing-safe N tests were used. The Egger test suggests evaluating the same bias using precision to estimate the standardized effect. When the t value of the Egger statistic is lower than the critical t value ($p > 0.05$), it is understood that there is no publication bias (CMA, 2024b: 92).

Funnel Plot, which is used to reveal potentially missing studies and determine the effect of these studies on the meta-analysis, is 0. The difference between the values observed in Duval and Tweedie's cut and add test and the corrected values obtained to correct the effect of publication bias and the absence of the number of missing studies (0) indicates that potentially missing studies have no effect on the meta-analysis. Duval and Tweedie's cut and add test is based on the main idea behind the funnel plot; if there is no bias, the plot will be symmetric about the summary effect, if there are more small studies on the right than on the left, the concern is that studies from the left may be missing. Duval and Tweedie's cut and add test discards these missing studies, adds them to the analysis, and then recalculates the summary effect size (CMA, 2024b: 89). Kendall's tau b test, which is used to determine whether the number of studies included in the analysis has an effect on the pooled correlation coefficient obtained as a result of the analysis, is interpreted as the Z statistic being higher than the critical value ($p > 0.05$) as indicating that the number of studies used has no effect on the result obtained and the results are reliable. In Rosenthal's classic fail-safe N test, which is used to determine how many studies are needed to invalidate the results obtained, it is determined how many studies are needed for the pooled correlation coefficient obtained in the study to be insignificant, what the critical correlation coefficient and the pooled correlation (correlation average) in these studies should be (Borenstein et al., 2007).

4. Findings

The studies and sample numbers used in the research are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Information on Studies Included in the Research

Working Names	r	n
1-Nitafan 2020	0,233	236
2-Al Haraisa 2021	0,779	207
3-Bakhshandeh & Zare 2021	0,587	349
4-NouriSamarin et al. 2021	0,320	376
5-Tharya et al. 2021	0,633	295
6-Abdulah & Amin 2022	0,761	150
7-Ghanbari & Mojooni 2022	0,424	324
8-Modnalizade & Javaheri 2022	0,770	205
9-Kassandrinou et al 2023	0,224	150
10-Lerebular & Amalia 2023	0,661	165
11-Mohammed 2023	0,867	75
12-Al Hasnawi et al. 2024	0,876	282
13-Pinto et al. 2024	0,265	222
14-Shahwan & Elazem & Mohamed 2024	0,613	169
15-Khakpour 2025	0,794	664
TOTAL	0,587	3869

Fifteen studies examining the relationship between organizational silence and burnout, and 3869 samples in these studies, were included in the analysis, and the correlation average was determined as 0.587.

4.1. Meta-Analysis Findings

Table 2 includes the heterogeneity/homogeneity control Q and I^2 test results regarding which model will be used in the meta-analysis.

Table 2

Test Results for Determining the Appropriate Model

Test	Value	df	SE / Variance	p	Result	Model
Q	488,700	14	-	0,000	Heterogeneous	Random Effect
I^2	97,135	-	-	-	Heterogeneous	Random Effect
Tau^2 / Tau	0,136 / 0,368	-	0,059 / 0,003	-	Heterogeneous	Random Effect

In order to determine the relationship between organizational silence and burnout, according to the Q ($Q = 488.70 > df = 14$) and I^2 ($I^2 = 97.13 > 75$) tests conducted for the heterogeneity/homogeneity control of the studies included in the research, it was determined that there was a high level of variance (heterogeneity). Therefore, it was found that the use of the random effect model was appropriate. Considering the expected value of the work weights included in the research ($100/15 = 6.666$), it was determined that the work weights in the fixed effect model were far from the expected value (between 1.88% and 17.29%), whereas in the random effect model, the work weights were close to the expected value and were distributed more evenly (between 6.27% and 6.84%) (Table 2; Figure 1).

4.2. Meta-Analysis Results

Table 3 presents the meta-analysis results regarding the relationship between organizational silence and burnout.

Table 3

Meta-Analysis Results on the Relationship Between Organizational Silence and Burnout

Statistic	Result
N	15
r	0,635
r (Lower Limit)	0,508
r (Upper Limit)	0,735
Fisher's Z	0,749
Fisher's Z (Lower Limit)	0,559
Fisher's Z Upper Limit)	0,939
SE	0,097
DVariance	0,009
Z	7,736
p	0,000

As a result of the meta-analysis conducted with the random effect model in order to determine the effect of organizational silence on burnout, it was determined that the effect of organizational silence on burnout was statistically significant ($Z=7.74$; $p<0.05$). According to the correlation mean ($r=0.635$) and Fisher's Z (Fisher's $Z=0.749$) statistics obtained in the random effect model valid due to heterogeneity, the effect of organizational silence on burnout was determined to be at a large effect level ($R^2=0.403 > 0.25$). This effect is expected to be between 0.258 and 0.540 (Table 3, Figure 2).

4.3. Findings Regarding Bias

The meta-analysis results regarding how many studies are needed to refute the findings regarding publication bias, the effect of potentially missing studies on the meta-analysis, pooled correlation, and Fisher's Z statistics are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Findings Regarding Bias

Test	Statistic	Innovation→ Sustainability
		Value
Egger	Value	-1,778
	SE	6,458
	t	0,275
	p (1-tailed)	0,394
	p (2-tailed)	0,787
	Result	1
Duval and Tweedie's Trim and Fill	Point estimate (Observed Values)	0,749
	Point estimate (Adjusted Values)	0,749
	Lower limit (Observed Values)	0,559

Result Tau <i>b</i>	Lower limit (Adjusted Values)	0,559
	Upper limit (Observed Values)	0,939
	Upper limit (Adjusted Values)	0,939
	Q (Observed Values)	488,699
	Q (Adjusted Values)	488,699
	(Observed values - Adjusted values =0)	
	2	
	Value (Without continuity correction)	0,152
	Value (With continuity correction)	0,143
	Z (Without continuity correction)	0,792
	Z (With continuity correction)	0,742
	p (1-tailed) (Without continuity correction)	0,214
	p (1-tailed) (With continuity correction)	0,229
	p (2-tailed) (Without continuity correction)	0,428
	p (2-tailed) (With continuity correction)	0,458
Classic Fail-Safe N (Rosenthal)	Result	3
	Observed Z	44,597
	Observed p	0,000
	Alpha	0,050
	Tails	2
Orwin's Fail-Safe N	Z	1,959
	Number of Observed Studies	15
	Fisher's Z in observed studies	0,751
	Correlation in observed studies	0,635
	Criterion for a "trivial" Fisher's Z	0,100
	Mean Fisher's Z in missing studies	0,050

1: No publication bias; 2: Possible missing studies have no impact on the meta-analysis; 3: This study was not affected by the number of articles used;

According to the Egger test results in the studies examining the relationship between organizational silence and burnout, it was determined that there was no effect of publication bias in the studies included in the research (Egger=-1.78; $t=0.27$; $p>0.05$) (Table 4). Funnel Plot was examined in order to determine the effect of possible missing studies on the meta-analysis, and it was seen that the studies were distributed symmetrically on both sides of the funnel plot (Figure 3). Similarly, according to the results of Duval and Tweedie's cut and add test, it was determined that the difference between the observed values and the corrected values obtained to correct the effect of publication bias was 0.000 ($0.749-0.749 = 0.000$). According to this finding, possible missing studies have no effect on the meta-analysis (Table 4). According to the results of Kendall's Tau *b* test, which was conducted to determine the relationship between study size (number) and effect size, it was determined that the number of studies included in the research had no effect on the effect size value obtained from this study (Tau $b=0.143$; $Z=0.742$; $p>0.05$) (Table 4). According to the results of the Orwin (fail-safe N) safe N test, which was conducted to determine how many studies are needed to refute the effect size result obtained in this study, 196 studies are required for the Fisher's Z coefficient obtained in this study to be insignificant ($p>0.05$). Since the insignificance Fisher's Z coefficient was determined as 0 (Fisher's $Z\leq 0.100$) and the

insignificance correlation coefficient was determined as 0 ($r \leq 0.100$), the average Fisher's Z correction coefficient in the 196 studies should be 0.050 and the pooled correlation should be 0.100. When the publication bias results in Table 4 are evaluated together, it is seen that there is no publication bias effect in the meta-analysis results obtained from this study.

Figure 1

Working Weights Chart



Figure 2

Effect Size Graph with 95% Confidence Interval

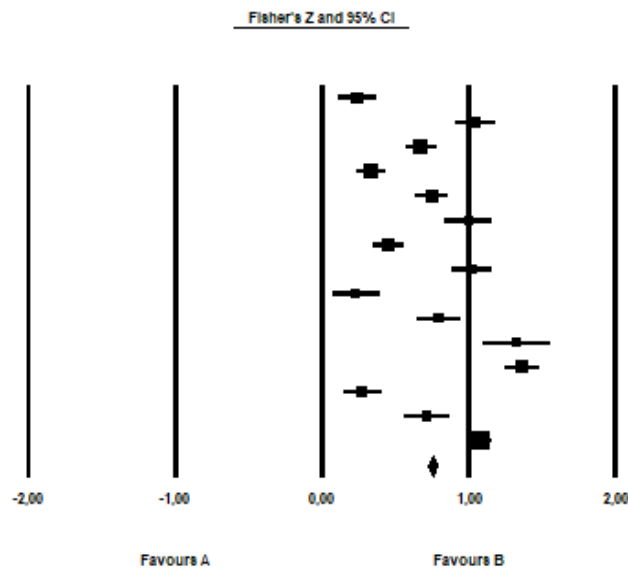
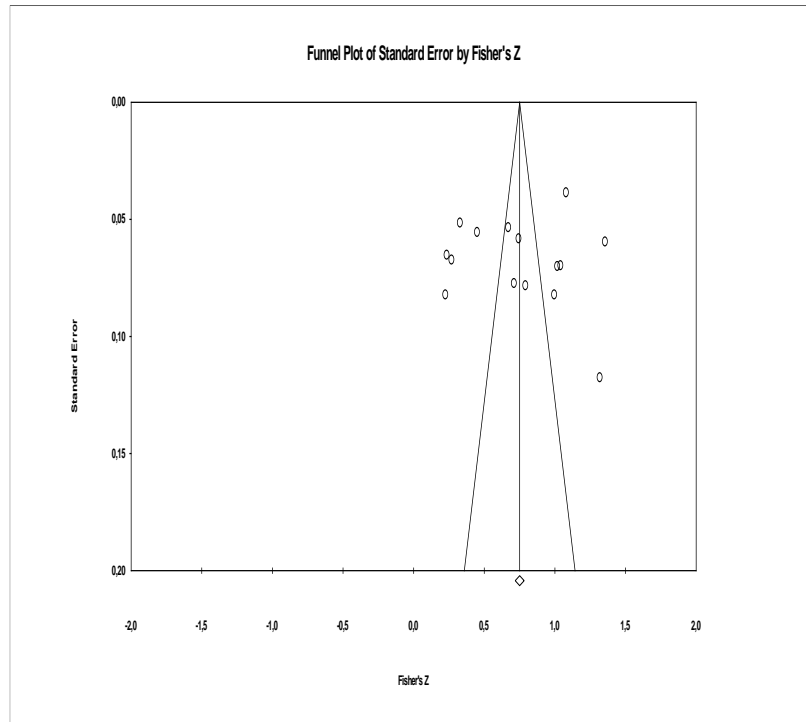


Figure 3

Funnel Chart



5. Conclusion

It is observed that the relationship between organizational silence and burnout is explained through factors that influence employees' attitudes. Al-Rousan and Omoush (2018) stated that the factors leading to organizational silence also trigger the emergence of burnout. They emphasized that effective communication between employees and a flexible organizational structure can help overcome both organizational silence and burnout. Khakpour (2025) identified a significant relationship between silence and emotional exhaustion. Lainidi et al. (2025) found that the relationship between burnout and silence is moderated by the tendency to express oneself, indicating that as self-expression increases, burnout tends to decrease. Durmuş (2022) determined that managers reduce silence by strengthening interpersonal relationships among employees in the workplace, which in turn creates a mitigating effect on burnout. Modnalizade and Javaheri (2022) asserted that organizational cynicism and negative attitudes stemming from a lack of information influence the relationship between silence and burnout. NouriSamarin et al. (2021) found that organizational silence mediates the indirect effects of centralized decision-making and mobbing on burnout. The findings in these studies are supportive of our research.

To determine the relationships between organizational silence and burnout, an evaluation was carried out on 15 studies and 3111 samples within the scope of the meta-analysis method. According to the findings of the study, it was determined that there was a strong positive relationship between organizational silence and burnout ($r=0.635$). It was also seen that organizational silence had a large effect level on burnout ($R^2 = 0.403$). However, according to the Egger test parameters regarding whether there was publication bias in the studies between organizational silence and burnout, it was determined that there was no publication bias.

It can be thought that due to the positive relationships between organizational silence and burnout, the probability of employees who exhibit organizational silence to suffer from burnout syndrome will increase. According to the Funnel Plot parameters, it was determined that the missing studies had no effect on the meta-analysis. According to the results of Kendall's Tau b test, it was seen that the number of studies did not have any effect in terms of "effect size".

According to the meta-analysis results, it is possible to improve the relationships between followers and managers by making improvements in the organizational structure and leadership approach that trigger organizational silence. In other words, it can be stated that employees supported by strong and continuous feedback mechanisms (Pinder & Harlos, 2001) and positive reinforcements decrease their tendency to exhibit organizational silence, and that burnout can be prevented. In addition, the intersection of the concepts of organizational silence and burnout is a stress factor. Organizational silence increases stress, and stress increases burnout (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). In this context, it can be thought that controlling the factors that trigger stress at the organizational level will indirectly reduce burnout. In the studies in the relevant field, it is emphasized that excessive workload, insufficient managerial support, and level of responsibility are important triggers among the factors affecting burnout (Bemana et al., 2013).

This meta-analysis has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis was limited to studies published in specific databases and languages, which may have led to publication bias by excluding relevant unpublished or non-English studies. Second, methodological differences among the included studies—such as varying measurement tools for organizational silence and burnout—may have introduced heterogeneity in the effect sizes. Third, the cross-sectional nature of most studies limits causal inference. Lastly, although moderator analyses were conducted, there may be other

contextual or organizational factors that influence the relationship between organizational silence and burnout, but could not be tested due to data limitations. Future research may benefit from including longitudinal studies, broader samples, and more diverse cultural contexts to address these limitations.

Conflict of Interest: On behalf of all authors, the responsible author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethics Approval: This study does not require any ethics committee approval.

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