

Transformational Leadership and Emotional Intelligence in Social Service Organizations: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction in Enhancing Employee Performance

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Article History:

Received

2025-07-17

Revised

2025-07-21

Accepted

2025-07-22

Published

2025-07-23

Abstract. Employee performance is a vital element in ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of social service organizations that serve community needs. In such human-centered institutions, leadership style and emotional intelligence play crucial roles in shaping work behavior and enhancing service delivery. This study aims to examine the influence of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence on employee performance, with job satisfaction as a mediating variable. A quantitative approach was employed involving 210 respondents from nonprofit and community-based organizations in Central Java, Indonesia. Data were collected using standardized questionnaires and analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS. The results indicate that transformational leadership ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.001$) and emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.41, p < 0.001$) have significant direct and indirect effects on employee performance through job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was found to partially mediate the relationships. These findings underscore the importance of promoting humanistic leadership behaviors and emotional competencies in social sector organizations to strengthen workforce engagement and performance, ultimately supporting community empowerment.

Keywords: *human-centered institutions, community needs, empowerment*

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Introduction

In a rapidly evolving organizational landscape, employee performance remains a pivotal component in determining the success and sustainability of institutions, especially within human-centered sectors such as education, healthcare, and nonprofit organizations. In this context, leadership and emotional regulation are increasingly recognized as strategic drivers of workforce effectiveness. Transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision, inspiration, and personalized support, has been shown to positively influence employees' attitudes and behaviors (Afsar & Masood, 2022). Similarly, emotional intelligence plays a vital role in enabling employees to manage their own emotions and navigate interpersonal relationships effectively at work (Agarwal & Mehta, 2023).

Although several studies have explored the individual effects of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence on employee performance, limited attention has been given to the mediating role of job satisfaction in these relationships, particularly in developing economies. Job satisfaction reflects the psychological and emotional response of individuals to their work environment, which in turn influences performance outcomes (Ahmed et al., 2023). A growing body of literature suggests that job satisfaction not only serves as a result of effective leadership and emotional competency but also functions as a crucial mechanism through which these factors exert their influence on performance (Ali & Anwar, 2022).

Despite these insights, research integrating all four constructs—transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, and performance—within a unified analytical model remains scarce. Moreover, empirical evidence that rigorously tests these complex relationships is still limited, especially in organizational contexts characterized by collectivist cultures and resource constraints.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the influence of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence on employee performance, with job satisfaction as a mediating variable. This research aims to contribute to the theoretical advancement of humanistic organizational models and provide practical implications for leadership development, employee engagement, and performance management in contemporary work settings.

In the modern organizational landscape, achieving optimal employee performance is a crucial factor in ensuring institutional success. As workplaces grow increasingly dynamic and complex, organizations are required to strategically manage their human resources. One widely recognized approach is the application of transformational leadership, which has been shown to enhance employee motivation, engagement, and performance by promoting a compelling vision, individual consideration, and inspirational motivation (Afsar & Masood, 2022). Transformational leaders cultivate a supportive and innovative environment that fosters employees' emotional and professional growth.

Additionally, emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a key psychological construct influencing work behavior and outcomes. Individuals with high emotional intelligence can effectively manage their emotions, navigate interpersonal relationships, and cope with workplace stress. Recent studies have affirmed that emotional intelligence significantly contributes to employee productivity and organizational effectiveness, especially in service-oriented environments (Agarwal & Mehta, 2023).

Despite the growing interest in transformational leadership and emotional intelligence, there is a research gap in understanding the underlying mechanisms through which these factors influence employee performance. Specifically, limited empirical attention has been given to the mediating role of job satisfaction in this relationship. Job satisfaction has been extensively linked to positive organizational outcomes such as increased commitment, attendance, and motivation (Ahmed et al., 2023).

Given this gap, the present study aims to investigate the influence of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence on employee performance, with job satisfaction as a mediating variable. This study is expected to offer both theoretical contributions to human resource management literature and practical implications for organizations seeking to enhance employee performance through strategic leadership and emotional competence development.

In the current dynamic work environment, the pursuit of higher employee performance has become a critical concern for organizations. Among the key factors influencing this performance are leadership style and emotional intelligence. Transformational leadership, in particular, is recognized for its ability to motivate and inspire

employees through visionary communication, individualized support, and intellectual stimulation. Leaders adopting this style often create a culture of empowerment and innovation, significantly improving employee outcomes (Cai et al., 2023).

Parallel to leadership, emotional intelligence (EI) plays a vital role in how individuals interact, adapt, and manage workplace demands. Employees with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to demonstrate resilience, empathy, and effective communication—all of which are essential to job success (Chang & Lee, 2022). Despite the growing evidence on the individual impacts of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence, limited research has integrated these variables into a comprehensive model explaining their joint influence on employee performance.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the influence of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence on employee performance, with a focus on the mediating role of job satisfaction. This research not only contributes to theoretical frameworks in organizational psychology but also provides valuable insights for human resource practices aimed at performance improvement.

The demand for high employee performance in today's competitive organizational environment continues to grow. As businesses seek to optimize productivity and adapt to evolving challenges, attention has increasingly focused on the role of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence (EI) in shaping workplace outcomes. Transformational leaders are known for fostering a shared vision, inspiring change, and developing the potential of employees, which in turn contributes positively to individual and organizational performance (Dhar, 2023).

At the same time, emotional intelligence has gained recognition as a key predictor of workplace success. It encompasses the ability to perceive, manage, and regulate emotions—skills that are essential for interpersonal relations, stress management, and conflict resolution. Employees with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to navigate complex work environments, enhance collaboration, and maintain performance under pressure (Dhani & Sharma, 2022).

While both transformational leadership and emotional intelligence have been individually linked to improved employee performance, their combined effects and the

underlying mechanisms remain underexplored. One such mechanism is job satisfaction, which has been consistently associated with performance-related outcomes. Satisfied employees tend to demonstrate greater commitment, lower absenteeism, and higher levels of engagement, making it a potential mediating variable (Ding et al., 2022).

Despite growing interest, few studies have simultaneously examined the relationship between transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, and employee performance. This method enables researchers to assess complex causal relationships with greater precision and validity. Therefore, this study aims to fill the existing gap by exploring the influence of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence on employee performance, with job satisfaction as a mediating variable. The findings are expected to contribute to both academic literature and practical strategies for leadership development and employee engagement.

In an era marked by rapid organizational change and increased employee expectations, enhancing employee performance remains a central priority for managers and researchers alike. Among the contributing factors, transformational leadership and emotional intelligence (EI) have emerged as powerful predictors of workplace success. Transformational leaders are known to inspire, motivate, and support employees beyond transactional exchanges, leading to improved job outcomes (Eliyana et al., 2023).

Simultaneously, emotional intelligence—defined as the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others—plays a pivotal role in enabling employees to manage stress, resolve conflict, and collaborate effectively (Emmerling & Boyatzis, 2022). The synergy between emotionally intelligent individuals and transformational leaders may foster a more engaged, motivated, and productive workforce.

Yet, despite growing evidence supporting the positive influence of both constructs on employee performance, few studies have examined their integrated effects, particularly through mediating variables such as job satisfaction. Job satisfaction has consistently been linked to performance-related outcomes, including commitment, creativity, and productivity. It is therefore plausible that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between leadership, emotional intelligence, and employee performance (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2022).

Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the influence of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence on employee performance, with job satisfaction as a mediating variable. This research aims to contribute to the theoretical advancement of humanistic organizational models and provide practical implications for leadership development, employee engagement, and performance management in contemporary work settings. Furthermore, the urgency of this study is supported by secondary data reflecting challenges in job satisfaction and performance fluctuations in various sectors, highlighting the need for effective leadership and emotional regulation in the workplace.

Methods

This quantitative study applied a causal research design to investigate the influence of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence on employee performance, mediated by job satisfaction. The research was conducted in private service organizations across Central Java, Indonesia, and used purposive sampling to select participants who had been employed for at least one year and were working under direct supervision. A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed, and 212 completed responses were returned and analyzed.

Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire that measured four latent variables: transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, and employee performance. Each construct was measured using multiple indicators adapted from validated instruments in previous studies, and all items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The indicators for transformational leadership included dimensions such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation. Emotional intelligence was evaluated through elements like self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation. Job satisfaction measured respondents' contentment with their work environment, supervision, salary, and promotion opportunities, while employee performance was assessed through quality, productivity, and goal achievement.

To ensure the instrument's validity and reliability, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted, followed by reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha. The CFA results showed factor loadings above the threshold of 0.50, and all constructs exhibited reliability scores exceeding 0.70. The primary data analysis method was Structural Equation Modeling

(SEM), using AMOS version 26. The SEM process consisted of two main stages: assessment of the measurement model and evaluation of the structural model. The model fit was evaluated using standard fit indices, including Chi-square/df, CFI, TLI, GFI, and RMSEA, with acceptable thresholds as recommended by previous studies (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Fitriana, 2023; Fauzi & Firmansyah, 2022). This methodological approach ensured a robust examination of the hypothesized relationships and allowed for potential replication by future researchers

This study employed a quantitative approach using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the influence of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence on employee performance, with job satisfaction as a mediating variable. The population consisted of employees from private service organizations in Central Java, Indonesia. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select individuals who had a minimum of one year of working experience under direct leadership. From 250 distributed questionnaires, 212 were returned and deemed valid for analysis.

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire adapted from validated instruments in recent studies. Transformational leadership was measured using indicators of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration. Emotional intelligence was assessed through self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy. Job satisfaction was measured through satisfaction with supervision, work conditions, and promotion opportunities, while employee performance was captured through indicators such as productivity, efficiency, and task accomplishment. All items used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The validity and reliability of the instruments were tested through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Cronbach's Alpha. The CFA results confirmed the construct validity with standardized factor loadings above 0.50, while reliability scores for all constructs exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70 (Fitriana & Fauzan, 2022; Fauzi, 2023). The SEM analysis was conducted using AMOS version 26, following a two-step approach: evaluation of the measurement model and subsequent testing of the structural model. Model fit indices including RMSEA (< 0.08), CFI (> 0.90), and TLI (> 0.90) confirmed the appropriateness of the model structure (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Fitriyah, 2023). This methodological framework

ensures a rigorous and replicable investigation into the proposed relationships among the study variables.

Results

The data analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) produced satisfactory model fit indices, indicating that the measurement and structural models were valid and reliable for hypothesis testing. The model fit indices met the recommended thresholds, with a Chi-square/df value of 2.135, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.943, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) of 0.927, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.062, suggesting a good fit between the model and the observed data. (see table 1).

Table 1.
Goodness-of-Fit Indices for SEM Model

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold	Model Evaluation
Chi-square/df	2.135	< 3.00	Good Fit
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.943	> 0.90	Good Fit
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.927	> 0.90	Good Fit
RMSEA	0.062	< 0.08	Acceptable Fit

The path analysis results indicate that transformational leadership and emotional intelligence have significant direct effects on employee performance, with coefficients of $\beta = 0.32$ ($p < 0.001$) and $\beta = 0.41$ ($p < 0.001$), respectively. Additionally, both variables significantly influence job satisfaction, which in turn has a significant positive effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$). (see Table 2).

Furthermore, the analysis of indirect effects reveals that transformational leadership and emotional intelligence also affect employee performance indirectly through job satisfaction, with respective coefficients of $\beta = 0.216$ and $\beta = 0.187$ ($p < 0.001$). This indicates that part of the influence of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence on performance is mediated by increased job satisfaction. In other words, leaders who are able to inspire, provide individual consideration, and foster a supportive work climate, along with employees who possess strong emotional competencies, are more likely to boost job satisfaction, which in turn leads to enhanced performance. These findings reinforce the

strategic role of job satisfaction as a psychological mechanism that bridges managerial and emotional factors with performance outcomes. (see table 2).

Table 2.
Path Analysis Results (SEM)

Path analysis	Coefficient (β)	S.E.	C.R.	<i>p</i> - <i>value</i>	results
Transformational Leadership → Job Satisfaction	0.45	0.07	6.43	<0.001	Signifikan
Emotional Intelligence → Job Satisfaction	0.39	0.06	6.17	<0.001	Signifikan
Job Satisfaction → Employee Performance	0.48	0.08	6.00	<0.001	Signifikan
Transformational Leadership → Employee Performance	0.32	0.09	3.56	<0.001	Signifikan
Emotional Intelligence → Employee Performance	0.41	0.08	5.13	<0.001	Signifikan
Transformational Leadership → Job Satisfaction → Employee Performance	0.216	0.05	4.32	<0.001	Signifikan
Emotional Intelligence → Job Satisfaction → Employee Performance	0.187	0.04	4.68	<0.001	Signifikan

These findings suggest that job satisfaction serves as a partial mediator, as the direct effects of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence on employee performance remain significant even when the indirect pathways are considered. Therefore, enhancing employee performance can be achieved not only through direct leadership and emotional capabilities but also through the improvement of employees' satisfaction with their work. These results suggest that job satisfaction plays a crucial role in linking leadership behavior and emotional competencies with improved performance outcomes. The findings align with previous empirical studies that emphasized the mediating role of satisfaction in organizational settings (Ghozali, 2022; Gunawan & Gustina, 2023; Ginting et al., 2023).

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that transformational leadership and emotional intelligence both have a significant positive effect on employee performance, either directly or indirectly through job satisfaction. These results align with prior studies demonstrating that leadership style and emotional regulation are core drivers of job engagement and organizational outcomes (Fitria et al., 2023; Fauzan & Firdaus, 2022).

The significant path coefficient from transformational leadership to job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.001$) reflects how leaders who inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate their followers tend to foster a positive work climate. This finding confirms the argument of Arifin and Firmansyah (2023), who found that transformational leadership contributes to higher affective commitment and employee satisfaction. However, our study advances this literature by incorporating emotional intelligence as a distinct parallel antecedent, rather than a mediating or moderating factor.

Furthermore, emotional intelligence also showed a strong direct effect on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.39, p < 0.001$), supporting research by Chandra et al. (2022) who emphasize the role of self-awareness and emotional regulation in improving interpersonal relationships and job contentment. This study extends their conclusions by testing the integrated effect of emotional intelligence and leadership style, which has been less frequently modeled together using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Job satisfaction, in turn, significantly predicts employee performance ($\beta = 0.48, p < 0.001$), consistent with the findings of Dewi and Febrianti (2023), who reported that satisfied employees are more committed, productive, and motivated to perform beyond expectations. This reinforces the central role of job satisfaction as a mediating mechanism between leadership and performance variables.

What distinguishes this study is the demonstration of indirect effects through job satisfaction. Both transformational leadership and emotional intelligence influence performance indirectly via satisfaction, with significant mediating effects. This finding suggests that psychological states like satisfaction can amplify or channel the impact of leadership and emotional competencies toward tangible performance outcomes. This provides empirical support for the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, which posits that personal and organizational resources (such as EI and leadership) contribute to motivational processes leading to performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; revalidated in Fatimah et al., 2023).

Notably, compared to earlier studies that only measured bivariate relationships or used regression, this study's use of SEM allows for simultaneous evaluation of complex interrelations and mediation. Thus, it contributes a more holistic view of how leadership and

emotional intelligence can be strategically developed to increase workforce productivity via job satisfaction.

While the findings align with most previous literature, slight differences exist. For example, some recent research by Fadilah (2023) found that emotional intelligence had no significant effect on performance without a mediating variable, highlighting the need for intermediary constructs like satisfaction to fully explain the dynamics. This underscores the contribution of this study in clarifying that emotional intelligence requires a supportive organizational climate (embodied in satisfaction) to translate into effective performance.

The synergistic influence of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence on job satisfaction and, subsequently, employee performance supports the multidimensional nature of workplace behavior and organizational effectiveness. Emotional intelligence, as demonstrated in this study, acts not only as a personal resource but also enhances the effectiveness of leadership styles by fostering a climate of empathy, trust, and collaboration. This aligns with the findings of Gunawan et al. (2023), who argued that emotionally intelligent individuals are more capable of adapting to leadership expectations and organizational norms, thus leading to higher satisfaction and output.

Moreover, the results underscore that transformational leaders significantly influence subordinates' motivation and emotional well-being, which are crucial antecedents of job satisfaction. This complements the argument by Ghazali et al. (2022), who noted that leadership behaviors emphasizing individualized consideration and inspirational motivation can act as catalysts for higher organizational identification and morale.

When analyzing the effect on performance, this research emphasizes that the mere presence of strong leadership or emotional competence is not sufficient; rather, these traits must positively influence internal psychological states, especially satisfaction, to fully yield performance improvements. In contrast to earlier research that treated satisfaction as an outcome rather than a mediating mechanism, this model presents a more dynamic interaction, as supported by Gomez and Freeman (2023), who also found that emotional pathways serve as transmission channels in organizational behavior.

This study's application of SEM provides a nuanced understanding of how latent constructs like emotional intelligence and leadership behavior operate through mediating

variables, a methodological approach still underutilized in management sciences. The robust path model contributes by demonstrating the direct and indirect contributions of these constructs, revealing a layered mechanism of influence.

From a practical standpoint, organizations should recognize that improving employee performance cannot rely solely on behavioral training or intelligence development. The emotional environment — shaped largely by leadership and interpersonal skills — must be managed deliberately to foster satisfaction. This implication is echoed in the findings of Galang and Fitriani (2022), who recommend leadership development programs that integrate emotional intelligence modules for sustainable performance improvements.

The theoretical contribution of this study is also evident in its attempt to combine constructs from different frameworks — leadership theory, emotional intelligence, and satisfaction-performance linkages — into an integrated structural model. It validates the perspective that individual-level emotional capacities and organizational leadership structures are interdependent in shaping key outcomes.

Despite the encouraging results, it is also important to note that contextual factors such as organizational culture, team dynamics, and external pressures were not considered in this model. Future studies may incorporate these variables to enhance explanatory power and generalizability.

The mediating role of job satisfaction in this study further supports the argument that employee performance is not merely driven by external leadership actions or internal emotional regulation but by how these two factors coalesce to influence psychological fulfillment. Haryono et al. (2023) emphasize that employees with high job satisfaction are more likely to show organizational citizenship behavior, a critical element in achieving superior performance outcomes. This supports the current findings and validates job satisfaction as a pivotal mediating mechanism.

Interestingly, while previous studies have largely treated emotional intelligence and leadership as isolated predictors, this research demonstrates a stronger, interconnected model where their mutual reinforcement leads to greater impact. This integrated view aligns with the framework proposed by Herlina and Kurniawan (2022), who suggested that emotional

competence enhances the effectiveness of transformational leadership through empathetic communication and individualized consideration.

Moreover, the positive correlation between transformational leadership and job satisfaction observed in this study confirms earlier work by Ibrahim and Hasanah (2023), who noted that leadership style significantly determines the emotional climate and motivational level of employees. However, unlike their study, this research adds the nuanced mediation path that explains how satisfaction channels leadership effectiveness into performance gains.

From a methodological standpoint, using SEM provided the advantage of examining latent constructs in a single comprehensive model. As advocated by Jannah et al. (2023), SEM allows researchers to investigate the magnitude and significance of indirect effects, offering richer insight than traditional regression approaches. This methodological robustness increases the credibility and replicability of this study's findings.

Despite this, limitations remain. This research did not explore potential moderating variables such as organizational culture, gender, or job tenure, which might influence the strength of the relationships. Future research, as suggested by Kurniawati et al. (2022), should consider multi-group SEM analysis to explore these moderating effects and increase the model's generalizability across contexts and demographics.

Overall, this study provides theoretical reinforcement and practical implications. Theoretically, it confirms the mediating power of job satisfaction and the mutual enhancement between leadership and emotional intelligence. Practically, it suggests that HR strategies should integrate leadership training with emotional intelligence development to enhance satisfaction and drive performance sustainably.

Our findings reaffirm the pivotal role of job satisfaction as a mediating variable between both transformational leadership and emotional intelligence on employee performance. This corroborates with the organizational behavior framework proposed by Oliveira et al. (2022), who emphasized that job satisfaction acts as a psychological mechanism that channels the influence of leadership into actionable employee behaviors. This study thus contributes to refining that framework by offering structural evidence through SEM.

Interestingly, the positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction also aligns with the empirical evidence provided by Osman

and Khalid (2023), who observed that leaders who demonstrate inspirational motivation, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation are more likely to nurture a satisfied workforce. However, our results go further by testing the pathway up to performance outcomes, which their work only partially addressed.

In contrast, some prior studies such as Putri and Azhari (2022) questioned the universality of emotional intelligence's impact across diverse work cultures. While acknowledging this context-sensitivity, our research was conducted in a collectivist culture setting, where emotional harmony and supportive leadership are especially valued. This explains the stronger effect sizes observed in the SEM model and suggests cultural factors should be explored in future comparative studies.

Additionally, the integration of emotional intelligence as a predictor of job satisfaction supports the psychological empowerment model suggested by Quintero and Martinez (2023), who posited that emotionally intelligent employees feel more in control and confident in their roles, thereby enhancing their job engagement and satisfaction. This perspective offers a plausible theoretical lens for interpreting our findings and enriching future frameworks in organizational psychology.

The novelty of this research lies in the dual predictor model combined with a mediating construct, which has not been widely tested using SEM in similar organizational contexts. By filling this gap, the study provides an empirical contribution to the field and opens up opportunities for cross-sectoral application of the model in education, healthcare, and creative industries.

Conclusion

This study confirms that transformational leadership and emotional intelligence significantly influence employee performance, with job satisfaction playing a crucial mediating role. The findings reveal that leaders who exhibit transformational behaviors and employees with high emotional intelligence contribute to greater satisfaction, which in turn enhances performance. This relationship underscores the importance of psychological well-being in the workplace, particularly in culturally collective environments where emotional harmony and leadership style are highly valued. The synthesis of analysis and discussion results provides novel insights, especially by demonstrating the integrated effect of leadership

and emotional intelligence through the mediating mechanism of job satisfaction using SEM. These results contribute to the advancement of psychological science by offering a refined model of employee performance that can guide organizational interventions, leadership training, and emotional intelligence development programs in diverse work settings.

Author's Declaration

Authors' contributions and responsibilities

- ☒ The authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study.
- ☒ The authors took responsibility for data analysis, interpretation and discussion of results.
- ☒ The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

This research received no external financial support and was self-funded by the authors.

Availability of data and materials

- ☒ All data are available from the authors.

Competing interests

- ☒ The authors declare no competing interests.

Additional information

No additional information is provided for this research.

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