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## **Gender Disparity in the Teaching Profession: A Comparative Analysis of Female Teachers in Somalia and East Africa – Strategies for Empowerment and Workforce Expansion**

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### **Abstract**

This comparative study focuses on gender disparity in the teaching profession in Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, identifying challenges and recommending tangible interventions aimed at empowering female teachers and growing the teaching workforce. Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania have introduced gender-sensitive policies, mentorship programmes, and community involvement that have made tangible improvements in promoting gender equity in the teaching profession; however, the evidence from the post-conflict context in Somalia shows limited female representation, particularly within the teaching workforce at both primary and secondary levels. Despite the fact that the national policy for

teachers emphasises gender equity, acknowledging the stark underrepresentation of female teachers and advocating for targeted recruitment to address these disparities, the study recommends a multi-pronged approach for Somalia, including the adaptation of regional best practices such as gender-responsive policies, mentorship networks, community sensitisation campaigns, and scholarship programmes for female trainees.

**Keywords:** *Gender Disparity, Teaching Profession, Comparative Analysis, Female Teachers, Somalia, East Africa – Strategies for Empowerment, Workforce Expansion*

## Introduction

The demographic composition of teachers often affects the efficacy of education systems. Higher proportions of female teachers correlate with increased engagement and learning outcomes, especially for female students (Wahsheh & Alhawamdeh, 2015). In Somalia, the current state of gender disparity in education reflects broader regional trends observed in East Africa, where female teachers are often underrepresented in comparison to their male counterparts. Addressing this disparity is critical because female teachers serve a dual role: they act as role models for girls and are catalysts for creating inclusive educational environments that promote gender equity (Anderson et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2018). Globally, efforts to advance gender equity in education, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, emphasise the importance of increasing the number of female teachers (Sommer et al., 2016).

Evidence suggests that female teachers positively influence girls' academic performance. In a study on teacher attitudes, it was found that teachers' positive attitudes substantially boost students' academic performance, implying that female teachers, who may have different engagement techniques that resonate well with young girls, can significantly contribute to their educational success (Yassin, 2021). Moreover, classrooms overseen by female educators often facilitate better relationships, fostering a supportive atmosphere conducive to learning. This enhances academic achievement and positive student-teacher interactions, which significantly boosts students' motivation and engagement (Thabiti et al., 2023). The implementation of gender-responsive teaching methods has also been linked with improved academic outcomes, as these approaches allow for a more inclusive and relatable

teaching environment for female students (Bolarinwa et al., 2020; Visser et al., 2021).

The gendered landscape of educational environments plays a decisive role in shaping pedagogical experiences and academic trajectories. The instructor's gender substantially affects student subject perception, with female educators particularly effective in alleviating performance anxiety in stereotypically male-dominated disciplines like mathematics (Lee et al., 2018).

Empirical evidence reveals that institutional gender parity in teaching staff correlates strongly with enhanced female educational retention and ambition (Anderson et al., 2018; Sommer et al., 2016). Consequently, policy initiatives promoting women's educational leadership emerge as both a moral imperative and a strategic intervention for comprehensive academic improvement.

This study, designed as a descriptive comparative method, aims to investigate gender inequalities in the teaching profession through a comparison of the status and experiences of female teachers in Somalia vis-à-vis East Africa, especially Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, to identify effective pathways for empowerment and workforce expansion. The three countries were deliberately selected by the authors based on data availability, given the time when Somalia joined the East African Community, in order to capitalise on their experiences for alignment. Under the best-case scenario, Somalia's teaching profession would achieve gender equity, featuring a balanced representation of female teachers at all levels and fostering an inclusive learning environment. In stark contrast, the country has huge gender imbalances in its teaching staff: a painful situation stemming from conflict that has left female teachers so disproportionately underrepresented (Ministry of Education, 2020), compared to those in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. To remedy this situation, the study suggests a multi-pronged approach where successful mechanisms are adapted from East Africa, including gender-responsive policy frameworks and mentorship programmes. Some of the questions the study deals with are: What is the current state of gender parity in the teaching profession in primary and secondary education in Somalia compared to Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania? Which strategies can be put in place to advance women's representation? The strength of this study lies in guiding policymakers to develop actions for gender equity in education. Descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage analyses of trends over time, were employed, along with the Gender Parity Index (GPI), to assess gender disparities.

## Literature Review

Gender disparity in the teaching profession remains a significant issue in Somalia. This literature review examines the factors contributing to this disparity while also drawing comparative insights from East African countries, specifically Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, as Somalia is a member of the East African Community.

*Socio-Cultural Influences:* Socio-cultural influences are important factors related to the traditional gender roles manifested in teaching. Traditional gendered career stereotypes still actively influence the profession. Gender stereotypes that are embedded in education systems are responsible for continual inequalities, especially regarding labour force participation and opportunities, exacerbating existing gender disparities (Angeles et al., 2021). Moreover, existing patriarchal structures demonstrate further prejudice in teacher pedagogies and reinforce the notion of teaching being less prestigious than other professions (Osinaike, 2023).

Additionally, the experiences of male and female educators can differ significantly in school environments, where male teachers may be celebrated as leaders, while female teachers remain underrepresented in positions of authority (Myers & Griffin, 2018). This gendered hierarchy serves to further entrench disparities in the profession. The interplay of these socio-cultural factors and structural barriers creates a reinforcing cycle that perpetuates gender disparities in the teaching profession.

*Structural Barriers and Systemic Inequities:* systemic barriers further continue to impact the gender gap in education. This gap is evident in the differences in motivation and attitudes between the genders wherein female pre-service teachers tend to hold more positive attitudes about the teaching profession compared to their male counterparts (Deringöl, 2020). Such differences can create issues in recruitment and retention rates, with fewer male students enrolling in teacher education programmes than female students. In addition, the utility of mentoring and professional development opportunities affects women in the profession as well (Malik et al., 2023). The gender gap has even further implications for female teachers that would reinforce the systemic barriers and inequities in the teaching profession and education. Structural inequities, institutional bias, and a lack of equitable resources further exacerbate the situation and reinforce gender inequities which might be self-perpetuating (Woodcock & Monteith, 2012).

## ***Strategies to Boost Female Teacher Representation***

Expanding the number of female teachers is a complex task that includes issues around systemic causes of inequity, professional motivations and incentives, diversity policies, and a supportive institutional culture. A diverse teacher workforce can benefit student learning outcomes and is key to increasing the number of females hired, which advances both educational and gender equity (Holt & Gershenson, 2017; Chapman et al., 2022).

One significant strategy to expand the workforce of female teachers is the implementation of merit-based pay systems, which can incentivise high-quality teaching and attract top talent, including females (Bowen & Mills, 2017). The traditional salary structure may disproportionately favour male teachers, potentially leading to a gender imbalance in hiring practices. Thus, schools and districts could benefit from evaluating their compensation frameworks to promote equity among genders (Bowen & Mills, 2017). Furthermore, enhanced recruitment efforts for underrepresented groups within teaching professions can help build a more balanced workforce (Holt & Gershenson, 2017).

Supportive work-family policies are also an important factor in recruiting and retaining female teachers (Goñi-Legaz et al., 2020). A family-friendly work culture is an essential contributor to job satisfaction for female educators (Goñi-Legaz et al., 2020). Organisations can enhance a culture conducive to family-friendly practices by providing flexible work schedules and parental leave policies that support both currently and aspiring female teachers. Meanwhile, organisations can establish mentorship programmes for women in education to aid retention by providing a supportive environment for professional development (Huch et al., 2019). Moreover, addressing the gender elements in training programmes can significantly enhance recruitment of females into the teaching profession. Creating pre-service and in-service training that include gender awareness and sensitisation will help prepare all educators, and collectively, allow them to appreciate diversity and facilitate equity (Warin, 2017). Further training to highlight gender balance could create a dual advantage: better educational experiences for students and enhanced recruitment for female educators who seek supportive and comprehensive educational philosophies (Maurer & Qureshi, 2019). Policy in educational areas should align with the prospective workforce diversification goal rather than passive or soft diversification policies that invite initiatives to address the need for representation (Superfine et al., 2012). This could be

implemented through funding for female candidates wishing to join teacher training programmes and holding schools accountable for their diversity indicators (Atteberry et al., 2015).

### ***Comparative Insights from East African Countries***

As this study centres on empowering female teachers in Somalia, it draws upon insights from the experiences of East African countries—Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania to explore effective strategies and practices from these nations.

**Kenya** has undertaken a series of initiatives aimed at improving the number of female teachers in primary and secondary education. The Kenyan government has made policies to support gender equity in education, including the Education Sector Policy and the Gender Policy in Education, both of which require the recruitment and retention of female teachers (Hailu, 2023). The policies aim to achieve gender equity in the teaching workforce to improve educational outcomes for all students (Wanjala et al., 2020). Additionally, to elevate the status of women in the teaching profession, Kenya has developed professional development programmes that focus specifically on female teachers. The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) has begun a reform agenda regarding curricula that concentrates on gender-sensitive education and recognises the importance of utilising female teachers in training and workshops (Sebastian et al., 2022).

These programmes, facilitated by organisations like the Kenya Women Teachers Association (KWTA), provide guidance and motivation for young women entering the teaching field (Muricho et al., 2021). Furthermore, the National Council for Nomadic Education in Kenya (NACONEK) has rolled out grassroots awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of female teachers in rural communities. By partnering with local leaders, these campaigns aim to dismantle cultural stigmas surrounding women's employment in education (Munala et al., 2023).

In Kenya, data provided by the Ministry of Education stipulates that female educators make up 54% of primary school teaching professionals, indicating a more balanced approach toward gender equity in primary teaching. However, the figure for female teaching professionals in secondary education is still just below 41%, which shows gender imbalance (Ministry of Education, 2020). Although various government

mechanisms are being implemented to boost the recruitment of female teachers and pursue gender equity (Iseme et al., 2024), there is still a role disparity along managerial roles, with women having lesser roles (Bobholz et al., 2024; Yen et al., 2024). Njenga (2024) draws attention to the financial difficulties faced by vocational teachers in Kenya, pointing out that many of them turn to self-financing their professional development. This suggests that supportive policies are needed to make training and development programmes more accessible (Njenga, 2024).

**Uganda** is making strides in promoting female teachers within its educational milieu. The Ministry of Education and Sports has developed a Gender in Education Policy which establishes target ratios for female teachers, especially in regions where there is gender disparity (Kariuki et al., 2023). The Education Act (2008) promotes gender-sensitive hiring protocols, which reflect on equitable hiring at schools. In addition, the Government of Uganda, in collaboration with non-governmental organisations like the Global Partnership for Education, provides scholarships and other forms of financial support to female students enrolled in teacher training qualifications (Kay & Kiptiony, 2020). Furthermore, women educators have created networks, like the Women Educators Network, to establish connections and provide both resources and advocacy to female teachers in Uganda (Cheloti & Njue, 2023). In Uganda, the situation related to female teachers is a mixed picture. The statistics report shows that females are approximately 43% of primary school teachers and about 47% of secondary teachers (CEIC Data, 2016). Even with these positive developments, leadership positions in secondary schools will still tend to be male-dominated and reflect the broader societal norms of leadership in educational administration and governance (Bobholz et al., 2024; Mpuangnan, 2024).

**Tanzania** has put in place several efforts to increase female teacher participation in education. The Education Sector Development Plan, with its focus on gender parity, permits school administrators to prioritise the recruitment of female teachers (Kaptich et al., 2019). The Tanzania Teachers' Union and other government initiatives invest in professional training of female teachers to prepare them for both advancement and access to leadership (Owuor et al., 2020). The development of a gender-responsive curriculum also advocates for female students to pursue teaching, with curriculum modules on gender equity and empowerment (Ayieko et al., 2018). Community sensitisation campaigns promote

knowledge by educating families about the importance of female educators and subsequently generating more support (Golding & Batiibwe, 2020). The statistics for Tanzania also indicate a similar trend; women teachers constitute about 48% of the primary education workforce and represent about 33% of the secondary education workforce (Trading Economics, 2020). Various educational policies have tried to stimulate female teachers' inclusion, but cultural perspectives and systemic barriers are preventing their progression into leadership, particularly in secondary schools (Shiboko & Mrema, 2024; Layag & Ofrin, 2024). Moreover, recent research has indicated that female teachers lack adequate support for development professionally or at the workplace level, which has consequences for their professional advancement (Iseme et al., 2024; Yen et al., 2024).

***In Somalia***, social, cultural, economic, and educational factors influence gender disparity in the teaching profession. These factors create major inequities in the representation and treatment of female educators relative to their male peers, ultimately affecting educational outcomes in Somalia. The common cultural perception that teaching is a less appropriate profession for women discourages those potential female candidates who may have aspired to a teaching career (Mohamud, 2017). Many young women encounter challenges in completing their education for various reasons, including early marriages and monetary limits that ultimately restrict the qualifications for teaching jobs (Mohamud, 2017). Furthermore, while female teachers are consciously taking steps to enter into the profession, they often have less opportunity to engage in ongoing professional development compared to their male counterparts, impacting career advancement and job satisfaction (Abdi, 2023).

Somalia's National Teacher Policy seeks to professionalise and regulate the teacher workforce by establishing standards regarding teacher training, registration, recruitment, deployment, remuneration and discipline of teachers, and emphasising pre-service and in-service teacher training (including Continuous Professional Development (CPD)) for those in primary and secondary. Gender equity is emphasised, with an acknowledgement that female teachers are currently severely underrepresented and a focus on targeting recruitment efforts to close the gap, as well as the teacher management information system (TMIS) to track teachers and ensure adherence to a code of conduct to protect students and ensure professionalism for teachers (Ministry of Education, 2020). In line with this policy, the Somali Ministry of Education, Culture

and Higher Education has designed a five-year plan to strengthen and increase teachers, the plan for female teachers in primary and secondary schools included outcomes for inclusive education and improved teacher practice with a focus on increased trained female teachers through pre-service programmes (Ministry of Education, 2018). To assess the situation of female teachers in Somalia, the tables that follow depict longitudinal data from the academic years 2018/2019-2023/2024 for the purpose of examining gender equity in the teaching profession. The data represented are official statistics published by the Somali Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education that examine the gender parity among primary and secondary school teachers in four Somali member states (Galmudug, Hirshabelle, Southwest, Jubaland, and the SSC Khatumo region).

Under this policy, the Somali Ministry of Education, Culture, and Higher Education has developed a five-year strategy to enhance and increase the number of teachers. This strategy for female teachers in primary and secondary schools aims to promote inclusive education and improve teacher skills by setting specific goals. A key focus is on increasing the number of female teachers trained through pre-service programmes (Ministry of Education, 2018). To assess the status of female teachers in Somalia, the following tables present longitudinal data from the academic years 2018/2019 to 2023/2024, aimed at examining gender disparities in the teaching profession. This data was sourced from official statistics released by the Somali Ministry of Education, Culture, and Higher Education. The analysis focuses on gender parity among primary and secondary school teachers across four Somali member states: Galmudug, Hirshabelle, Southwest, and Jubaland, and the SSC Khatumo region.

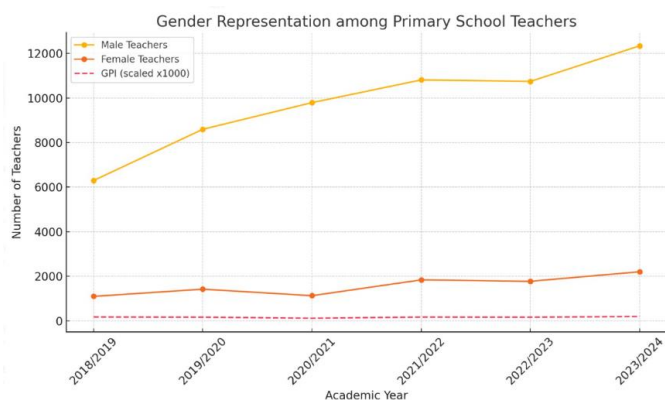
**Table1.** *Gender Representation among Primary School Teachers*

Academic Year * 1	Male	%	Female	%	Total	GPI* <sup>2</sup>
2018/2019	6296	85.16	1098	14.84	7394	0.174
2019/2020	8596	85.82	1421	14.18	10017	0.165
2020/2021	9793	89.67	1129	10.33	10922	0.115
2021/2022	10812	85.48	1838	14.52	12650	0.170
2022/2023	10746	86	1774	14	12520	0.165
2023/2024	12342		2203		14545	0.196

\* <sup>1</sup> Source: Ministry of Education, Federal Government of Somalia's Annual Education Statistics Yearbook: (2018-2024).

\* <sup>2</sup> GPI: Gender Parity Index.

**Table 1** details the gender distribution of primary school teachers across multiple academic years, including the counts and proportions of male and female educators, total teacher numbers, and the Gender Parity Index (GPI). Over the observed period, the total count of primary teachers rose steadily, climbing from 7,394 in 2018/2019 to 14,545 in 2023/2024. Male teachers constituted the vast majority, increasing from 6,296 (85.16%) to 12,342, while their proportion stayed consistently high, ranging between 85% and 89.67%. On the other hand, female teachers grew in number from 1,098 (14.84%) to 2,203 (15.14%), yet their share remained relatively low, fluctuating between 14% and 15%. The GPI, reflecting the ratio of female to male teachers, varied from 0.115 to 0.196, peaking in 2023/2024. Despite this modest rise, the GPI underscores a persistent disparity, with male teachers still dominating the profession.



**Figure1.** Gender Representation among Primary School Teachers

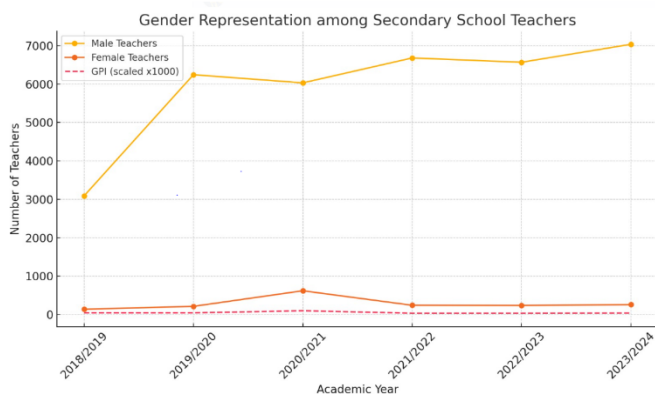
**Table 2.** Gender Representation among Secondary School Teachers

Academic Year	Male	%	Female	%	Total	GPI* <sup>2</sup>
2018/2019	3089	96.58	139	3.42	3228	0.045
2019/2020	6242	96.69	214	3.31	6456	0.045
2020/2021	6030	90.68	620	9.32	6650	0.10
2021/2022	6678	96.51	242	3.49	6920	0.036
2022/2023	6566	97	237	3	6803	0.036
2023/2024	7034		259		<b>7203</b>	0.04

\* <sup>1</sup> Source: Ministry of Education, Federal Government of Somalia's Annual Education Statistics Yearbook: (2018-2024)

\* <sup>2</sup> GPI: Gender Parity Index.

Table 2 illustrates a persistent and severe gender imbalance among secondary school teachers over six academic years. The teaching profession is heavily male-dominated, with men consistently comprising between 90.68% and 97% of the workforce. Their numbers have significantly risen from 3,089 in 2018/2019 to 7,034 in 2023/2024. In stark contrast, female teachers remain significantly underrepresented, accounting for only 3% to 9.32% of the total, with their highest proportion (9.32%) occurring in 2020/2021 before dropping back to around 3% in subsequent years. Although the total number of teachers more than doubled, growing from 3,228 to 7,203, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) remained extremely low (ranging from 0.036 to 0.10), indicating minimal progress toward gender balance. The brief increase in female representation in 2020/2021 was not sustained, and the latest GPI of 0.04 in 2023/2024 underscores the ongoing disparity. These trends underscore the necessity of targeted policy measures to enhance gender equity in secondary school teaching staff.



**Figure 2.** *Gender Representation among Secondary School Teachers*

## Key Findings and Strategies

The study highlighted variations in female teacher representation across Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Somalia. While Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania show progress through policy reforms, Somalia—still rebuilding its education system after prolonged conflict—faces persistent challenges. Key findings are detailed below.

**Policy Efficacy and Implementation:** Kenya and Uganda demonstrate the influence of sufficiently strong policy frameworks on change. The

gender-sensitive education policies in Kenya increased the number of female teachers in primary schools (Sperandio & Kagoda, 2010). Uganda's specific recruitment targets for female educators have similarly contributed to enhanced gender parity within the teaching workforce (Sperandio & Kagoda, 2010). Tanzania is trying through its policies, but policies alone are insufficient. The National Teacher Policy in Somalia is ineffective, resulting in negligible impacts, suggesting that fragile states need wrapper mechanisms of support, such as community engagement and developing institutional capacity, for meaningful changes (Briscoe, 2019).

**Professional Development and Mentorship:** Mentorship and ongoing professional development are crucial for retaining female teachers and facilitating their career advancement. In Kenya, structured mentorship and skill-development programmes have been effective in creating environments that support female teachers (Kipchirchir, 2024; Kadji-Beltrán et al., 2013). Formal mentoring systems significantly contribute to the retention and advancement of early-career teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). In contrast, Somalia lacks well-structured mentoring programmes, which severely affects retention rates of female educators and stifles their professional growth. Implementing mentorship networks and collaborative interactions can significantly bolster the professional growth and retention of female teachers (Okumu et al., 2023).

**Cultural Attitudes and Community Influence:** working on cultural attitudes is critical to making progress on female teacher representation. Kenya's grassroots awareness campaigns have successfully altered public ideas about women in education (Prado, 2023). Positive developments have also emerged from community sensitisation activities aimed at supporting the fact that women are educators in Tanzania (Chaula, 2024). Somalia, however, is significantly impacted by cultural barriers against women, especially early marriages and prescribed gender expectations and roles which stifle progress for women in education (Chandra Mouli & Patel, 2017). Addressing these societal impediments requires community engagement strategies that enable and mobilise community leaders and families, which is the approach taken in Kenya, as we know (Prado, 2023).

**Financial and structural support systems:** financial support systems usually have the most success in reducing barriers for women pursuing an educational career. Scholarships available for female teacher trainees in

Uganda have successfully increased the number of women entering the teaching profession (Mujuni et al., 2022; Miïro et al., 2018). On the contrary, in Somalia, because of the lack of financial incentives, the number of women enrolling in teacher training programmes has been very low (Mujuni et al., 2022). Given these facts, there could be a beneficial impact from financial support mechanisms, such as scholarships, and support systems, such as safe transport arrangements for women, to assist with eradicating economic barriers (Ralph & Walker, 2013).

**Leadership Gaps and Sustainable Strategy:** all four countries show the gap of women in leadership roles in the education sector, predominantly at the secondary level. Despite a small reported increase in female primary teachers in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, female leadership influence remains heavily male-dominated (Sperandio & Kagoda, 2010). In Somalia, women appear to have no remarkable representation of leadership at any level, indicating a severe disparity compared to the other three countries (Kipchirchir, 2024). In addressing this gap, countries must focus on implementing leadership training, promotion policies that point toward gender equity, and ridding the workplaces in all education sectors of discrimination (Kadji-Beltrán et al., 2013).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, empowering female teachers in Somalia requires a multi-pronged approach that examines what has worked and why in neighbouring countries, like Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. These countries have all made substantial progress with clear policy, mentorship, and community awareness. In Somalia, cultural, economic, and structural barriers challenge the processes and structures supporting female educators. To foster meaningful change, Somalia must strengthen its policy frameworks, establish robust mentorship networks, promote community awareness, and implement financial support systems tailored for women pursuing teaching careers. These actions will improve the educational landscape for women and improve participation rates in the workforce more broadly. By adopting these multi-dimensional strategies, Somalia can lay the foundation for a more inclusive, equitable education system that benefits all students.

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## **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest (financial, personal, or professional) in any aspect of the study that have affected the conduct, findings, or conclusions. This study has been conducted, found, and concluded without outside influence or competing interest and has been done with the utmost academic integrity.

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