



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Identification of Hospital Behavioral Codes: A Case Study of Shahid Sadoughi Hospital in Yazd

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ABSTRACT

Background: The development and implementation of ethical and behavioral codes in workplaces, especially in healthcare, are crucial for improving service quality, increasing client satisfaction, and creating healthy work environments. This study aims to identify and analyze behavioral codes in three key areas—general, nursing, and support services—at Shahid Sadoughi Hospital in Yazd, with the objective of enhancing personnel performance and boosting patient satisfaction.

Methods: This qualitative study utilized a focus group method. The participants' population comprised head nurses, supervisors, and managers from clinical, paraclinical, and support departments of Shahid Sadoughi Hospital. Purposive sampling was conducted based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. A total of eight focus group sessions were held, each with 12 to 14 participants. Data were collected through audio recordings and analyzed using qualitative content analysis with MAXQDA2022 software.

Results: The codes of conduct were identified in three areas: general, nursing, and support services. Moreover, the findings were organized into three main themes, each containing several subthemes. The results indicate that adherence to ethical, professional, and legal principles across these areas is essential for fostering healthy, safe, and effective work environments. Key principles include respectful behavior, discipline, confidentiality, trustworthiness, responsibility, and timely task completion. Observance of these principles correlates with improved organizational performance and increased satisfaction among clients and colleagues.

Conclusion: Given the significance of professional ethics and conduct codes, hospital managers should emphasize both general and specific aspects tailored to various job categories. By modeling ethical behavior, they can lead by example in promoting adherence to these principles in practice.

Keywords: Codes of conduct, Professional ethics, Nursing, Hospital

Introduction

Today, various ethical principles, laws, and standards are formulated at organizational, national, and even global levels under the term “codes of ethics” or “ethical charters,” which professionals are expected to adhere to (1). Codes of ethics comprise a set of principles and standards that guide human conduct, determining the behavior of individuals and groups. Ethical dos and don'ts within each profession should

be articulated through a rational process to foster a common understanding of the values that should be maintained and promoted within the organization (2).

In health-related professions, where human interaction and communication are paramount, whether with patients or colleagues, the adherence to ethical principles is particularly crucial. The quality

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of these interactions, especially in relation to a patient's mental or physical vulnerabilities, can significantly influence the doctor-patient relationship and the patient's recovery process (3).

A code of conduct serves as a guide and model for behavior, aligning with public morality and ethics while being specifically tailored to organizational goals. The term "code" indicates that these guidelines have a mandatory and prescriptive nature, detailing specific behaviors that members of the organization are required to follow. This alignment helps bridge the gap between individual and organizational identities, ensuring that personal goals are in harmony with organizational objectives. Such alignment promotes coherence across various sectors within the organization and clarifies the expected behaviors and boundaries for different roles, thereby reducing conflicts and misunderstandings (4).

However, many organizations, especially in developing countries, face challenges where members' behaviors are often influenced more by informal rules and relationships than by formal regulations. In these contexts, behaviors may align more with public and traditional cultural norms rather than established laws and regulations (5).

Establishing deterrent laws and regulations alone without implementing detailed codes of conduct to clearly define boundaries, will not achieve the desired outcomes. Effectively implemented codes of conduct can help mitigate these issues within organizations. They can institutionalize impartiality and prevent personal biases from affecting decisions and actions. Therefore, the development and implementation of such codes can serve multiple purposes: they educate employees about appropriate behavioral patterns and provide detailed guidance for fostering professional conduct (6).

Promoting ethics within hospital organizations is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon with far-reaching effects. The first step in this process is to reflect on the foundational concepts of ethics, the identity of professional ethics, the nature of the hospital organization, and the environmental elements that shape it. The principles promoting

ethics can be analyzed from various perspectives, including anthropology, methodology, and epistemology. Key principles include the need for a comprehensive ethics document, the principle of re-imagination, the avoidance of reductive thinking, and the recognition of the comprehensive impact of hospital organizational health on sustainable development and societal security (7).

Employees in professional organizations often prefer to work in environments characterized by ethical standards, as these contribute to a positive team dynamic and enhance job satisfaction (8). In healthcare, where nurses have more frequent contact with patients than other professionals, the importance of ethical conduct is especially pronounced, and the compassionate and responsible behavior of nurses is vital for promoting patient recovery. It can be asserted that nursing is fundamentally rooted in ethics, with an inherent commitment to respecting human rights, including cultural rights, the right to life, and the dignity of all individuals (9).

Hospitals, as centers for health and medical services, play a crucial role in maintaining and promoting societal health. The professional behavior and human interactions of medical staff directly influence service quality and patient satisfaction. Therefore, the development and implementation of appropriate codes of conduct can enhance personnel performance, reduce intra-organizational conflicts, and increase patient satisfaction (10).

Given that Shahid Sadoughi Hospital in Yazd is an important medical center in the region, identifying relevant codes of conduct could serve as a model for other hospitals. This study aims to identify and analyze behavioral codes at Shahid Sadoughi Hospital to improve staff performance and enhance patient satisfaction. However, there is a scarcity of studies focusing on the identification of behavioral codes in Iranian hospitals. For instance, Abdolmaleki et al (3) studied ethical challenges in clinical education and found that the absence of specific codes of conduct can lead to abnormal behaviors in medical settings. Additionally, research by Chip et al. (4) highlighted that adherence to ethical and behavioral principles are crucial for increasing

patient satisfaction. This study seeks to identify and analyze the codes of conduct at Shahid Sadoughi Hospital in Yazd.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach utilizing the focus group method. This method allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' opinions, experiences, and perspectives, making it particularly suitable for issues that require a comprehensive understanding of human behaviors, attitudes, and interactions.

The participants' population included head nurses, supervisors, and managers from the clinical, paraclinical, and support departments of Shahid Sadoughi Hospital in Yazd. Purposive sampling was conducted based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Moreover, inclusion criteria required participants to have at least five years of work experience at the hospital and to be willing to participate. Exclusion criteria included a lack of willingness to continue participating at any stage of the study.

A total of eight focus group sessions were conducted, each with 12 to 14 participants. Each session lasted approximately 60 minutes and continued until theoretical saturation was reached. The sessions were held in a relaxed environment to encourage participants to express their opinions freely. A semi-structured interview guide was

used, which included key questions about codes of conduct in nursing, general practices, and support areas. For instance, one important question asked was, "What do you think is the most important behavior in the unit that should be observed by your colleagues?"

Data were collected through audio recordings of the focus group sessions. After each session, the recorded content was transcribed and prepared for analysis. To ensure the accuracy and validity of the data, the transcriptions were reviewed and approved by the participants. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis, aided by MAXQDA2022 software. In this process, data were categorized into primary codes, from which main concepts were extracted.

To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, triangulation methods were employed, utilizing multiple data sources and participant reviews. Triangulation refers to the use of different methods or data sources to examine a phenomenon, allowing for confirmation of findings from various perspectives. This approach helps reduce bias and increases the reliability of the results. Additionally, to ensure data reliability, the analysis was performed independently by two researchers, and their results were compared.

Results

Table 1. General codes of conduct

Core principle	Sub-principles	Key concepts	Participant statements (behavioral code)
Hierarchy and duty orientation	1. Observing administrative hierarchy	Respecting chain of command and reporting to direct supervisors	"We always emphasize hierarchical protocol, addressing issues first with our direct supervisor."
	2. Professional duty commitment	Performing tasks with precision and high quality	"Even without direct orders, we strive to complete duties accurately, on time, and to high standards."
	3. Minimizing absenteeism and time management	Reducing absenteeism and optimizing break times	"We minimize work absences and avoid excessive time spent on breaks/lunch."
Social responsibility	1. Environmental standards compliance	Reducing paper use toward green hospital initiatives	"We utilize technology to minimize paper consumption."
	2. Improving public health literacy	Enhancing community health awareness	"As hospital staff, we work to improve public health literacy within our capacity."
	3. Elderly Assistance	Providing special support to elderly patients	"We offer additional guidance and assistance to elderly patients when needed."
Privacy Protection	1. Patient privacy	Seeking permission before entering rooms; avoiding intrusive questions	"We always request permission before entering patient rooms."
	2. Colleague privacy	Respecting colleagues' digital privacy	"We do not view colleagues' phone or computer screens without permission."
Meeting etiquette	1. Punctuality and respect	Arriving on time; avoiding side conversations	"We commit to attending meetings precisely at the scheduled time."
	2. Purpose-driven meetings	Conducting meetings with clear agendas	"Meetings are only held with prior coordination and clear objectives."
Colleague interaction	1. Mutual respect	Using formal address in presence of guests	"In front of guests/clients, we address colleagues by their last names."
	2. Respectful conflict resolution	Voicing disagreements privately and professionally	"Disagreements with colleagues are addressed respectfully in private."
Dress code and grooming	1. Personal hygiene	Maintaining cleanliness in the workplace	"We consider personal hygiene at work a professional obligation."
	2. Professional attire	Wearing clean, pressed lab coats; minimal jewelry	

This table (1) outlines core professional principles in a healthcare setting, emphasizing hierarchy, social responsibility, privacy, meeting etiquette, colleague

interaction, and dress code. Each principle includes sub-principles, key concepts, and behavioral examples demonstrating expected staff conduct.

Table 2. Nursing conduct codes

Main category	Subtopics	Code of conduct
Professional ethics	- Respectful and compassionate behavior - avoiding gossiping and divulging secrets - maintaining privacy and confidentiality	- "We always treat people with respect and compassion." - "We know that gossiping is wrong, even if it pleases our superiors." - "We always respect the privacy and dignity of individuals using hospital services."
Order and discipline	- Punctuality at work - maintaining cleanliness and order in the workplace - adhering to hospital regulations	- "We try to be on time and even earlier than our colleagues at work." - "We observe order, discipline, and tidiness in the workplace and neatness in appearance in accordance with Islamic culture and hospital regulations."
Confidentiality and trustworthiness	- Maintaining the secrets of clients and colleagues - avoiding curiosity in colleagues' documents - not receiving cash or non-cash gifts	- "Given the nature of our work, we make it our priority to observe complete confidentiality and trustworthiness." - "We never disclose the secrets and confidential information of clients."
Responsibility	- Performing assigned tasks on time - informing the supervisor about issues affecting work - establishing clear professional boundaries	- "We inform our supervisor or employer about issues that may affect our ability to do the job." - "We perform the tasks assigned to us within the scope of our job description without exception and with a smile."
Effective Communication	- Open and honest communication with clients and colleagues - honesty in expressing abilities and limitations	- "We communicate with people in an open and effective manner to promote their health, safety, and well-being." - "Be honest with ourselves and others about what we can do."
Maintaining the workplace	- Observing safety and cleanliness of the workplace - separating waste and turning off electrical appliances	- "At the end of the working day, we do not forget to close the gas valves of kitchen appliances, disconnect unnecessary electrical appliances from the outlet, and turn off lights and heating/cooling appliances." - "We try to separate waste as much as possible."
Commitment to laws	- Adhering to hospital rules and regulations - avoiding inappropriate behavior	- "We do not leave the workplace during assigned working hours without reason or permission." - "We do not lie, slander, libel, gossip, or speak ill of managers behind their backs."
Health and safety	- Maintaining one's own health and safety and that of others - adhering to health and safety guidelines	- "We are committed to always having a health and safety card available." - "We always make sure that our actions or omissions do not harm the health or well-being of an individual."

This table2 shows that "Nursing Codes of Conduct" comprehensively address various issues that are essential for improving the quality of patient care and creating a healthy and professional work

environment. The guidelines helped nurses to make the best decisions and adhere to ethical and professional principles when faced with everyday challenges.

Table 3. Support services group codes of conduct

Main category	Subtopics	Code of conduct
Professional ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Respectful and compassionate behavior - Avoiding gossiping and divulging secrets - Maintaining privacy and confidentiality 	<p>- "We always treat people with respect and compassion." - "We know that gossiping is wrong, even if it pleases our superiors." - "We always respect the privacy and dignity of individuals using hospital services."</p>
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being on time for work - Maintaining cleanliness and order in the workplace - Following hospital rules 	<p>- "We try to be on time and at work before the rest of our colleagues." - "We observe order, discipline, and tidiness in the workplace and neatness in appearance in accordance with Islamic culture and hospital rules."</p>
Confidentiality and trustworthiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintaining the secrets of clients and colleagues - Avoiding curiosity in colleagues' documents - Not receiving cash or non-cash gifts 	<p>- "Given the nature of our work, we make it our priority to observe complete confidentiality and trustworthiness." - "We never disclose the secrets and confidential information of clients."</p>
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Performing assigned tasks on time - Informing the supervisor about issues affecting work - Establishing clear professional boundaries 	<p>- "We tell our supervisor or employer about issues that may affect our ability to do the job." - "We perform the tasks assigned to us within the scope of our job description without exception and with good humor."</p>
Effective communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open and honest communication with clients and colleagues - Honesty in expressing abilities and limitations 	<p>- "We communicate with people in an open and effective manner to promote their health, safety, and well-being." - "Be honest with ourselves and others about what we can do."</p>
Maintaining the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Observing safety and cleanliness of the workplace - Separating waste and turning off electrical appliances 	<p>- "At the end of the working day, we do not forget to close the gas valves of kitchen appliances, disconnect unnecessary electrical appliances from the outlet, and turn off lights and heating/cooling appliances." - "We try to separate waste as much as possible."</p>
Commitment to Laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Following hospital rules and regulations - Avoiding inappropriate behavior 	<p>- "We do not leave the workplace during assigned working hours without reason or permission." - "We do not lie, slander, libel, gossip, or speak ill of managers behind their backs."</p>
Health and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintaining one's own health and safety and that of others - Following health and safety guidelines 	<p>- "We are committed to always having a health and safety card available." - "We always make sure that our actions or omissions do not harm the health or well-being of an individual."</p>

This table (3) shows that the "codes of conduct of the support service group" deal in detail with various issues such as confidentiality, accountability, health

and safety, which are necessary to improve the quality of patient care and create a healthy and professional work environment.

Table 4. Codes of conduct for law enforcement

Main category	Subtopics	Code of conduct
Professional ethics	- Respectful and compassionate behavior - Maintaining privacy and confidentiality - Avoiding inappropriate behavior	- "We treat colleagues and clients with respect." - "We avoid intimate conversations and jokes with colleagues in the presence of clients." - "We do not get involved in factional issues."
Discipline	- Being on time for work - Maintaining cleanliness and order in the workplace - Following organizational rules	- "As someone whose job is to create order in the organization, we value punctuality and timeliness." - "We always maintain our cleanliness and neatness in the workplace." - "We know the organization's regulations well."
Responsibility	- Performing assigned tasks on time - Informing the supervisor about issues affecting work - Establishing clear professional boundaries	- "We do not leave our post or move without coordination with our superiors." - "Contacting team leaders in case of any problems, special and suspicious cases."
Effective Communication	- Open and honest communication with clients and colleagues - Honesty in expressing abilities and limitations	- "We use appropriate and positive words to communicate with clients." - "We take the initiative in providing service to clients."
Maintaining the Workplace	- Observing safety and cleanliness of the workplace - Guiding and controlling people in public spaces	- "We guide and control people in public spaces and parking lots." - "We prevent uncoordinated and unauthorized entry to the hospital."
Commitment to laws	- Following organizational rules and regulations - Avoiding inappropriate behavior	- "We know the organization's regulations well." - "We do not leave our post or move without coordination with our superiors."
Health and safety	- Maintaining one's own health and safety and that of others - Following health and safety guidelines	- "In difficult situations, we maintain our composure and remain patient by using our skills of forbearance." - "We prevent uncoordinated and unauthorized entry to the hospital."

This table(4) outlines the codes of conduct for the hospital order team and covers key areas such as professional ethics, discipline, responsibility and safety. Emphasizes respectful behavior, adherence to rules, effective communication, and maintaining a safe workplace.

In this study, data were collected through 8 focus group sessions with the participation of head nurses, supervisors, and managers of clinical, paraclinical, and support departments of Shahid Sadoughi Hospital in Yazd. Data analysis was performed using the qualitative content analysis method and with the help of MAXQDA software. In this method, primary codes were developed from the data and then main concepts and themes were extracted. Finally, the findings are presented in the form of three main themes, each of which includes several subthemes. These themes and subthemes generally representing behavioral codes are as follows:

Main theme: hierarchy and duty

This theme includes behaviors that emphasize observing administrative hierarchy, duty, and commitment to completing tasks accurately and on time.

- Subtheme 1.1: Observing administrative hierarchy
 - o Participants emphasized that issues should first be discussed with direct supervisor and direct referral to higher-level officials should be avoided.
 - o Key sentence: "We always emphasize respecting the hierarchy and discuss issues with our direct supervisor first, not with superiors."
- Sub-theme 1.2: Duty and job commitment
 - o Participants stated that even if it is not mandatory to do something, they should perform their duties with accuracy and high quality.
 - o Key sentence: "Even if it is not mandatory from our superiors, we try to perform our duties accurately, on time, and with quality."

- Sub-theme 1.3: Reducing absenteeism and optimal use of time

- o Participants emphasized reducing absenteeism and optimal use of break and lunch time.

- o Key sentence: "We reduce absenteeism to the minimum and do not spend more time on break and lunch than necessary."

2. Main theme: Social responsibility

This theme includes behaviors that emphasize the social responsibility of hospital employees towards society, the environment, and patients.

- Sub-theme 2.1: Compliance with environmental standards

- o Participants stated that they should use technology to reduce paper consumption and move towards a green hospital.

- o Key sentence: "We are trying to use less paper by using technology."

- Sub-theme 2.2: Improving the level of health literacy in the community

- o Participants emphasized that they should help improve the level of health literacy in the community to the extent of their ability.

- o Key sentence: "As a hospital staff, we are trying to improve the level of health literacy in the community to the extent of our ability."

- Sub-theme 2.3: Helping the elderly

- o Participants stated that they should provide special assistance to the elderly who visit the hospital.

- o Key sentence: "We will provide more special assistance and guidance to the elderly who visit the hospital if needed."

3. Main theme: Respecting privacy

This theme includes behaviors that emphasize protecting the privacy of patients and colleagues.

- Sub-theme 3.1: Protecting patients' privacy

- o Participants emphasized that they should ask permission before entering patients' rooms and refrain from asking unnecessary questions.

- o Key sentence: "When entering patients' rooms, we ask permission from them and then enter."

- Sub-theme 3.2: Protecting colleagues' privacy

- o Participants stated that they should not peek into colleagues' mobile or computer screens and reveal their confidential information.

- o Key sentence: "We do not peek into our colleagues' mobile or computer screens."

4. Main theme: Meeting etiquette

This theme includes behaviors that emphasize observing the etiquette and principles of holding meetings in the hospital.

- Sub-theme 4.1: Maintaining order and respect in meetings

- o Participants emphasized that they should arrive at meetings on time and refrain from talking on the phone.

- o Key sentence: "We are committed to arriving at the meeting on time."

- Sub-theme 4.2: Purposeful meetings

- o Participants stated that meetings should be held with a clear and purposeful agenda.

- o Key sentence: "We do not hold meetings without coordination and we try to hold purposeful meetings with an agenda."

5. Main theme: Interaction with colleagues

This theme includes behaviors that emphasize professional and respectful interactions with colleagues.

- Sub-theme 5.1: Mutual respect

- o Participants emphasized that colleagues should be addressed by their last names in the presence of guests and clients.

- o Key sentence: "In the presence of guests and clients, we address colleagues by their last names."

- Sub-theme 5.2: Resolving conflicts respectfully

- o Participants stated that if they disagree with a colleague's idea or performance, they should raise it

with him/her respectfully and privately.

o Key sentence: "If we disagree with a colleague's idea or performance, we respectfully and privately discuss it with him."

6. Main theme: Dress and grooming

This theme includes behaviors that emphasize appropriate dress and grooming in the workplace.

- Sub-theme 6.1: Personal hygiene and cleanliness

o Participants emphasized that they should maintain personal hygiene and cleanliness in the workplace.

o Key sentence: "We consider it our duty to maintain personal hygiene and cleanliness in the workplace."

- Sub-theme 6.2: Appropriate and professional dress

o Participants stated that they should wear clean, ironed clothing and minimize jewelry.

o Key sentence: "The clothing used should be healthy, clean, buttoned, and ironed."

Discussion

In this study, a qualitative analysis was conducted on data related to codes of conduct and ethics across three areas: general conduct, nursing, and support (services and administration). The primary goal of this analysis is to examine the ethical, professional, and legal principles that employees in these areas must adhere to in order to create healthy, safe, and effective work environments. The results indicate that adherence to these principles not only enhances organizational performance but also increases satisfaction among clients, patients, and colleagues.

Across all three areas (nursing, services, and administration), there is a clear emphasis on respectful and compassionate treatment of clients and colleagues. For instance, in nursing, key principles include maintaining patient privacy and observing Islamic etiquette. In the services area, respectful treatment of clients and a prohibition against receiving cash or non-cash gifts are emphasized. In terms of discipline, the importance of respectful treatment and the avoidance of partisan issues are recognized as fundamental principles.

These findings align with similar studies conducted in the field of professional ethics. For example, a study by Fazeli et al. (9) highlighted that adherence to ethical principles, such as confidentiality and respect for patients, plays a crucial role in enhancing patient satisfaction and improving the quality of nursing services.

Discipline emerges as a critical principle in all three areas. In nursing, this includes adhering to shift schedules and coordinating with supervisors; in services, being punctual and maintaining workplace cleanliness are essential; and in administration, following organizational rules and being timely are equally important. These results correspond with findings from Rezaei et al. (11) which demonstrated that discipline in workplace leads to increased productivity and reduced errors.

Confidentiality and trustworthiness are also emphasized as core principles in all three areas. In nursing, maintaining patient confidentiality and refraining from disclosing sensitive information are vital. In services sector, it is crucial to respect confidentiality in client interactions and avoid prying into colleagues' documents. In the security domain, safeguarding the confidentiality of clients and colleagues is equally important. These findings are consistent with research by Mohammadi et al. (12), which underscored the significance of confidentiality in fostering trust among clients and colleagues and improving workplace relationships.

Furthermore, responsibility and timely task completion are highlighted as essential principles across all three areas. In nursing, timely execution of physician orders and informing supervisors about work-related issues are critical. In services, promptly completing assigned tasks and communicating relevant issues to supervisors are key factors. Similarly, in security, timely execution of tasks and effective communication with supervisors are paramount. These insights are corroborated by Hosseini et al. (13) who found that a sense of responsibility and timely task completion contribute to increased productivity and fewer errors.

The strategic role of codes of conduct in ensuring the

future success of organizations is undeniable; neglecting these codes can severely disadvantage firms. Ultimately, achieving professional ethics provides a strategic advantage (14).

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that adherence to ethical, professional, and legal principles in all three areas of nursing, services, and regulations plays a key role in creating healthy, safe, and effective work environments. These principles include respectful behavior, discipline, confidentiality and trustworthiness, responsibility, and timely completion of duties. These findings were consistent with similar studies conducted in the field of professional ethics and organizational behavior, and showed that adhering to these principles leads to improved organizational performance and increased satisfaction of clients and colleagues. Continuous training, including holding continuous training courses for employees in the field of ethical and professional principles, monitoring and evaluation in the form of creating monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure the correct implementation of these principles, and encouragement and punishment by creating incentive and punishment systems for employees who comply with or violate these principles, can help comply with these codes of conduct. Given the importance of professional ethics and codes of conduct and their impact on various aspects of the hospital, it is recommended that managers emphasize its general and specific dimensions based on different job categories during work and serve as a role model for others in taking the lead in practical compliance with the principles of the codes of conduct.

Limitations of the Research

The present study faced limitations such as reliance on self-reported data and the lack of practical assessment of the effectiveness of the codes.

Ethical considerations

This article is the result of a research project entitled "Identification of Hospital Conduct Codes: A Case Study of Shahid Sadoughi Hospital," which has the

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Authors' contributions

MS.A, F.H, E.S and M.Z designed research and conducted research; MS.A and F.H analyzed data; MS.A wrote the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interests.

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