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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to determine the influence of stakeholder participation on performance of rice sector in Kenya.

Methodology: The study was anchored on the stakeholder theory .The target population of this study comprised of 185 farmer representatives (cooperative managers), 36 staff of research institutions (researchers) and 9 managers of National Irrigation Authority and 16 rice millers (managers) as the key stakeholders of rice growing in Kenya. The study sample size was 152 and study adopted multi-stage sampling whereas purposive, stratified and random sampling techniques were appropriate for drawing sample size. The data collection instruments were questionnaires and interview schedules. The qualitative data was analyzed by use of the content analysis. While quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS Version 27. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were established.

Findings: The study revealed that stakeholder participation has a statistically positive and significant relationship with rice sector performance. The descriptive results indicated that majority of the respondents (mean =3.91, standard deviation =1.048) implied that stakeholder participation was among the stakeholder governance mechanisms employed in the rice sector in Kenya. The correlation results also revealed that stakeholder participation and performance of rice sector in Kenya were positively and significantly related ($r=0.810$, $p=0.000$). In addition, the regression results showed that stakeholder participation explains 65.7% of the variations in performance (r-squared $=0.657$), making it a strong predictor of performance in Kenya's rice sector. The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 234.042$, $p < 0.05$), and stakeholder participation had a positive and significant effect ($\beta=1.034$, $p=0.000$) on performance of rice sector in Kenya.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study recommends that managers in the rice sector actively engage all stakeholders farmers, government agencies, development partners, and local communities in decision-making processes. This is through implementing regular stakeholder meetings, surveys, and feedback mechanisms to ensure that stakeholders' voices are heard.

Keywords: *Stakeholder Participation, Performance, Governance*

JEL Codes: *H83, L25, L22*

INTRODUCTION

Under the good governance agenda, the government plays a vital role in fostering sectoral development by creating an enabling environment for various industries, including the rice sector. A key aspect of this role is redefining how stakeholders influence sector performance. A stakeholder in an organization is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives (McCollum et al., 2018). Good governance, in this context, refers to the processes and interactions by which an organization engages with its stakeholders, ensures accountability, and makes decisions that enhance transparency and responsiveness. When effectively implemented, good governance yields significant benefits for both stakeholders and the wider economy (Koech, 2020).

Governance mechanisms that promote stakeholder engagement are often linked to improved sector performance. According to Waswa (2018), stakeholder governance is frequently justified as a means of enhancing economic performance and institutional effectiveness. Naburi et al. (2020) highlight four key governance pillars that contribute to a thriving economy: transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and human rights. Stakeholder governance involves continuous processes through which diverse or conflicting interests are balanced to enable cooperative action (Mogambi & Nzonzo, 2016). It encompasses both formal regulatory frameworks and informal arrangements that align with the interests of key actors in a sector. Effective stakeholder governance, therefore, depends on public and private stakeholders embracing a broad framework that fosters negotiation and power balance (Waswa, 2018).

In the rice sector, stakeholders such as farmers, employees, policymakers, and consumers play a crucial role in sector survival and growth. Employees and customers, in particular, provide essential resources that drive productivity and sustainability (Kimathi, 2017; Tsofa et al., 2017). This perspective aligns with instrumental stakeholder theory, which asserts that organizations should prioritize stakeholders who directly influence their value and long-term success (Mutiso et al., 2021). According to this theory, stakeholder governance must give a voice to powerful stakeholders to secure their contributions, particularly in risk management and opportunity realization (Nyokabi et al., 2018). By strategically engaging these stakeholders, organizations can create value, enhance efficiency, and drive sustainable growth.

Beyond individual organizational benefits, stakeholder leadership and governance strengthen interactions among actors in the rice sector (Watanabe et al., 2021). Effective collaboration enables stakeholders to coordinate efforts, align objectives, and implement a shared agenda for sectoral development (Njeru et al., 2016). However, challenges such as information asymmetry and power imbalances among stakeholders often undermine the expected benefits of stakeholder governance in the rice sector (Mano et al., 2021). To address these challenges, governance approaches must emphasize transparency, efficiency, and trust-building to encourage investment and policy support (Waswa, 2018).

Despite the recognized importance of stakeholder participation in governance, measuring its impact remains a challenge. External factors in the operating environment often influence stakeholder-driven initiatives, making it difficult to isolate their effects (Waswa, 2018). While recent studies have proposed frameworks for evaluating stakeholder governance in different sectors (Watanabe et al., 2021), their application to the food and agricultural sectors, particularly the rice industry, remains limited (Nyokabi et al., 2018). This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this gap by examining the influence of stakeholder participation on the performance of Kenya's rice sector, providing insights into governance mechanisms that enhance transparency, efficiency, and sectoral growth.

Statement of the Problem

Governance mechanisms involving stakeholders play a crucial role in enhancing performance within the rice sector by fostering transparency, accountability, and collaborative decision-making (Kaloi et al., 2021). Engaging key stakeholders—such as farmers, policymakers, researchers, and agribusinesses—ensures inclusive policy formulation, efficient resource allocation, and the adoption of best practices. Strong governance frameworks also enhance market access, quality control, and sustainability efforts, leading to increased productivity and competitiveness. Ultimately, stakeholder-driven governance promotes resilience and long-term growth in the rice sector. These mechanisms are key in addressing inefficiencies in both production and post-harvest processes, which help reduce the annual losses ranging from 20% to 30% (IRRI, 2023). They also foster innovation and efficient resource use, aiding the sector in fulfilling the growing domestic demand for 500,000 metric tons annually (GoK, 2023). The profitability and returns on investment in the sector have also been volatile. From 2011 to 2020, the average annual growth in Profits before Tax (PBT) was under 20%. In 2018, PBT dropped by 21.6% compared to 2017, which had already experienced a 14.6% decline from the previous year. Similarly, PBT fell by 12.9% in 2015 following a 11.4% drop in 2014. Additionally, post-harvest rice losses remain high, ranging from 20% to 30% of total production (IRRI, 2023). These challenges persist despite various reforms aimed at improving the sector (Atenya & Nzulwa, 2018).

The poor performance of the rice sector has significant repercussions for various stakeholders. Farmers suffer from poor returns on their investments, while workers in the sector lose jobs as rice companies fail or shut down. The government struggles to meet its food security goals, contributing to the nation's broader food insecurity. Low agricultural investment and employment hinder economic growth, and the government's tax revenues are also affected by the weak performance of the rice sector.

Numerous studies have examined the role of stakeholder governance mechanisms in different sectors. Chang et al. (2015) explored the relationship between stakeholder governance and production efficiency, highlighting that firms focused on stakeholder governance strive to minimize input costs, thereby enhancing production efficiency. Adiguzel and Zehir (2016) investigated the impact of competitive strategies on stakeholder relationship management and behavior. In Kenya, research by Kanyagia (2016) and Mano, Njeru, and Otsuka (2021) focused on competitive strategies aimed at responding to changes in rice demand patterns. These studies found that stakeholder governance plays a crucial role in optimizing capacity utilization, fostering innovation, and reducing rice production costs. While these studies have explored stakeholder governance and its effect on performance in various contexts (Chang et al., 2015; Adiguzel & Zehir, 2016), they fail to consider the unique challenges of Kenya's rice sector. Furthermore, local studies (Kanyagia, 2016; Mano et al., 2021) have concentrated more on competitive positioning and have not thoroughly examined how stakeholder governance mechanisms affect sector performance. This study, therefore, aims to address this gap by evaluating the impact of stakeholder participation on the performance of Kenya's rice sector.

This study addresses the research gap by explicitly examining how stakeholder participation influences the performance in Kenya's rice sector, an area largely overlooked by prior research. Unlike previous studies that focused on competitive strategies (Kanyagia, 2016; Mano et al., 2021) or general stakeholder governance (Chang et al., 2015; Adiguzel & Zehir, 2016), this study investigates how stakeholder engagement including decision making process, consultation and information sharing influences the performance of rice sector in Kenya.

Objective of the study: To examine the influence of stakeholder participation on the performance of the rice sector in Kenya

Hypothesis of the Study: H_0: Stakeholder participation does not significantly influence the performance of the rice sector in Kenya

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder Theory was originally detailed by R. Edward Freeman in his book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (1984). Freeman et al. (2004) posit that a firm operates as a system of stakeholders within a broader societal framework, which provides the necessary legal and market infrastructure for its activities. According to this perspective, the fundamental purpose of a firm is to create wealth or value for its stakeholders by transforming their stakes into goods and services. This view aligns with Aliyu, Modu, and Tan (2018), who emphasize that stakeholder engagement is crucial for the long-term sustainability of firms. Their research highlights how firms that actively integrate stakeholder concerns into decision-making processes tend to experience greater operational stability and long-term success.

Freeman (1984) defines stakeholders as individuals or organizations whose actions either affect or are affected by a firm's operations. This includes employees, investors, and customers, among others. The theory further explains that organizations should consider the interests of all stakeholders when making strategic and operational decisions (Alsulaimi & Abdullah, 2020). This approach ensures that firms achieve not only their own goals but also align with the broader expectations of their stakeholders, thus fostering sustainable business practices.

However, stakeholder identification in the agricultural sector presents additional complexities. Omondi and Kimutai (2018) argue that in agriculture, stakeholders extend beyond employees and investors to include farmers, governmental bodies, political groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, trade associations, trade unions, communities, financiers, suppliers, and customers. In some cases, stakeholders may also be competitors, depending on their ability to influence firm performance. Aliyu et al. (2018) highlight that the nature of stakeholders is highly contested in academic literature, with thousands of varying definitions in circulation (Aziz & Abdel-Hakam, 2016). This variation in definitions complicates stakeholder engagement strategies, particularly in dynamic sectors such as agriculture.

In the rice sector, stakeholder groups have a direct role in governance, particularly in policy development and decision-making. Their influence extends to critical areas such as yield quantity, credit accessibility, and revenue generation (Angelopoulos et al., 2017). However, managing competing stakeholder interests can be challenging. Since different groups have varying priorities, it is often difficult to satisfy all stakeholders simultaneously. Aapaoja and Haapasalo (2014) note that stakeholder engagement can sometimes lead to decision-making delays due to competing interests, slowing down operational efficiency. Nevertheless, Stakeholder Theory has been extensively applied to navigate these challenges by providing a structured approach to addressing evolving demands within a dynamic agricultural environment.

Given the complexities of stakeholder governance in the rice sector, this study adopts Stakeholder Theory to examine the relationship between stakeholder governance and sector performance in Kenya. By analyzing how different stakeholder groups influence governance

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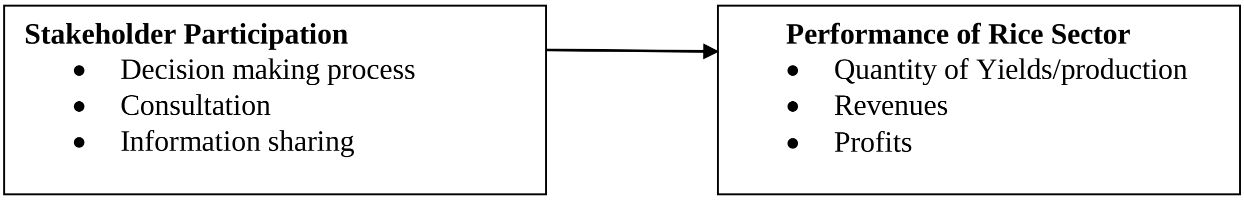
structures, the study seeks to determine the extent to which effective stakeholder participation can enhance the performance and sustainability of the rice sector.

Conceptual Framework



Independent variables **Dependent Variable**

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Empirical Review

Participation of the public is one of the national values and principles of governance enshrined in the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 (the Constitution). Article 10(2)(a) of the Constitution specifically states that the national values and principles of governance in terms of participation of the people (RoK, 2010). In the context of stakeholders' participation in agricultural matters, Stakeholder participation is the capability of the stakeholders to participate in the development of a value-creating corporate strategy in agriculture (Iringo, 2019). It is also the extent to which the stakeholders in the rice sector retain formal and real authority and this is usually allied to the balance between residual risk bearing and decision-making functions (Achandi & Mujawamariya, 2016). The dimensions of stakeholder participation for this study are: all voices are heard; members participate in decision-making; and timely information is shared. According to Choi et al, (2018), in organizations such as rice societies, member participation in the decision-making is an important measure of democratic member control. This would be measured by attendance of the general assembly or the annual general meeting by members, voting rights of the stakeholders, frequency of attending meetings by board members, frequency of meetings of various committees within the board among others. Therefore, it can be concluded that stakeholder participation in terms of informing stakeholders, involvement in decision making process and capacity building would improve performance of the struggling sector in Kenya.

Wittels (2020), opines that idea that policies reflect the preferences of citizens is at the heart of democracy. Participatory governance was created to increase such alignment. Given how many resources governments spend on such processes, we know very little about what happens to the input. The study employed a large field experiment to test (i) whether bureaucrats tasked with policy design and implementation engage with citizen input and (ii) whether bureaucrats' engagement with citizen input can be increased by using non-monetary rewards and value-based communication. It finds low baseline engagement but that motivational interventions increase engagement with citizen input. The study contributes to theories on the role of the bureaucracy in democratic participation. Empirically, its contribution centres on testing the potential for interventions to heighten the chances of participatory governance initiatives to deliver on their normative promises. While the study examines bureaucratic engagement with citizen input, it does not address how Kenya's agricultural agencies process stakeholder feedback in policy implementation.

Arifin and Samboteng (2020), research focused on increase the capacity building of governance participatory network in the implementation of food diversification policies in Indonesia. The time series results and techniques showed that community based organizations (CBOs) in this study were groups of female farmers who could not carry out effective policies. The fact was that the local government as an initiator could not involve them voluntarily. They were involved because of mobilization by the local government. Therefore, governance participatory, as local capacity development and action for improving shortcomings, needs to involve CBOs as a state-community cooperation in planning, decision-making, allocating resources, and other processes. CBOs encourage governments to be more responsive, reflective, and accountable. This research highlights participatory governance in Indonesia's food policies but does not consider Kenya's distinct socio-political and economic context.

In the Kenyan rice sector, stakeholder participation has held the promise of "deepening" democracy by increasing stakeholders' engagement with policy debates and involving them throughout the policy-making cycle (Wittels, 2020). Participatory governance takes a variety of forms - ranging from surveys, stakeholder consultations, deliberative fora such as citizen juries to citizen-led budgeting processes, so-called participatory budgeting. Often multiple forms of participation are combined and information condensed to provide briefs used in policy planning and implementation. Governments expend considerable effort and resources to run participatory processes in the rice sector (Apind et al, 2015). Yet, it remains largely unclear to what extent such processes deliver on their promise. The study notes that governments allocate resources for participatory governance but does not assess whether these efforts translate into tangible improvements in Kenya's rice sector.

Existing studies lack a contextual focus on Kenya's rice sector, with Wittels (2020) and Schattan et al. (2021) addressing governance broadly but ignoring sector-specific challenges like irrigation. Conceptually, Achandi & Mujawamariya (2016) and Choi et al. (2018) overlook informal governance and power dynamics. Methodologically, Arifin & Samboteng (2020) rely on time-series analysis but lack qualitative insights. Geographically, Ba et al. (2019) and Apind et al. (2015) focus on governance outside Kenya, leaving gaps in understanding stakeholder participation and policy execution in the rice sector, necessitating region-specific empirical research.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a positivist philosophy, emphasizing factual, observable, and experimental knowledge derived from existing theories (Amuhaya et al., 2018). Descriptive and correlational research designs were employed, enabling exploration of stakeholder participation mechanisms and their impact on the performance of Kenya's rice sector. Descriptive design highlighted sectoral characteristics and trends, while correlational design examined relationships between governance mechanisms and performance indicators, such as productivity and profitability (Cheruiyot et al., 2017; Orina et al., 2018). The study targeted 246 stakeholders, including cooperative managers, researchers, National Irrigation Authority staff, and rice millers, with a sample size of 152 determined using Slovin's formula (Kyalo et al., 2017). Sampling techniques included purposive sampling for specific groups and random sampling for farmers, ensuring representativeness and inclusivity (Gupta & Gupta, 2019). The study utilized primary and secondary data collection methods to investigate stakeholder governance in Kenya's rice sector. Primary data was collected using self-administered questionnaires designed to capture respondents' views on stakeholder participation. The questionnaires included closed-ended questions rated on a 5-point Likert scale and were categorized into sections addressing independent and dependent variables. Interviews were also conducted to gain in-depth insights from managers and representatives. A pilot study tested the reliability and validity of the research instruments, employing Cronbach's Alpha and factor loading analyses. Secondary data was obtained from government reports, policy documents, and databases to validate primary data. Data analysis involved SPSS for quantitative analysis, manual coding for qualitative insights, and statistical tools like regression for hypothesis testing. Results were presented using tables, and charts, ensuring clarity. This comprehensive approach triangulated qualitative findings with statistical trends to enhance validity and provide a holistic understanding of stakeholder participation.

RESULTS

Descriptive Results

The descriptive results indicate a generally positive perception of stakeholder participation in the rice sector, with an average mean of 3.91 and a standard deviation of 1.048, suggesting that most respondents agree on the importance of stakeholder involvement, though with some variation in responses. The highest-rated statement (mean = 4.11, std = 0.979) highlights that stakeholders are adequately consulted on rice sector management, reflecting strong engagement. Similarly, seeking stakeholder input for successful rice production (mean = 4.01, std = 0.900) and considering their views in strategic changes (mean = 3.99, std = 1.034) were highly rated, indicating recognition of stakeholder contributions. However, information sharing for decision-making (mean = 3.64, std = 1.073) and regular consultation exercises (mean = 3.78, std = 1.137) received slightly lower agreement, suggesting areas for improvement. These findings emphasize the critical role of stakeholder participation in enhancing decision-making, information sharing, and overall rice sector performance. Organizations should strengthen mechanisms for regular consultation, transparent information flow, and stakeholder feedback integration to maximize engagement benefits. Addressing gaps in information sharing and consultation frequency can further enhance stakeholders' ability to contribute effectively, leading to improved productivity, strategic alignment, and sustainable growth in the rice sector.

Table 1: Descriptive Results of Stakeholder Participation

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std Dev
1.All stakeholders are involved in decision making process to improve rice production	4%	8.9%	16.8%	34.7%	35.6%	3.89	1.13
2. All stakeholders' views are incorporated in the decision-making process	4%	7.9%	14.9%	33.7%	39.6%	3.97	1.109
3. The stakeholders are adequately consulted on the management of the rice sector in the country	0%	12.9%	4%	42.6%	40.6%	4.11	0.979
4. Stakeholder consultation exercises are conducted regularly to increase the yields in the rice schemes	8.9%	0%	23.8%	38.6%	28.7%	3.78	1.137
5. Stakeholders' information sharing is key on the management of the rice sector in the country	8.9%	0%	24.8%	26.7%	39.6%	3.88	1.202
6. Information sharing enhances stakeholders making right decisions on matters concerning rice in the country	4%	12.9%	18.8%	43.6%	20.8%	3.64	1.073
7. Stakeholders are given opportunity to give feedback on the rice production activities	0%	4%	29.7%	36.6%	29.7%	3.92	0.868
8. Stakeholders' views are considered whenever there are changes concerning strategic plans	4%	5%	14.8%	40.6%	35.6%	3.99	1.034
9. Stakeholders' inputs are sought on how to make the rice production activities successful.	0%	5%	24.8%	34.7%	35.5%	4.01	0.900
Average						**3.91**	**1.048**

Correlation Results

The findings indicate a strong positive and significant association between stakeholder participation and the performance of the rice sector ($r = 0.810$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that greater stakeholder involvement leads to improved performance. This result aligns with previous studies, such as Choi et al. (2018) and Ba et al. (2019), which found that effective stakeholder engagement enhances organizational performance. The significant correlation confirms that stakeholder participation fosters better decision-making, resource allocation, and strategic execution, ultimately boosting efficiency and productivity. These findings emphasize the importance of stakeholder participation in driving performance improvements in the rice sector. Active engagement from farmers, policymakers, researchers, and industry players enhances collaboration, innovation, and sectoral growth. To leverage these benefits, organizations should implement structured stakeholder participation mechanisms, encourage inclusive decision-making, and strengthen communication channels to ensure that all stakeholders contribute meaningfully to strategic objectives. By prioritizing stakeholder engagement, the rice sector can achieve sustainable development, enhanced productivity, and long-term competitiveness.

Table 2: Correlation Results

		Stakeholder Participation	Performance
Stakeholder participation	Pearson Correlation	1	.810**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Performance	Pearson Correlation	.810**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	101	101

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Regression Results for Stakeholder Participation and Performance

The regression results indicate that stakeholder participation significantly influences performance in the rice sector ($R = 0.810$, $R^2 = 0.657$, $p = 0.000$). The R^2 value of 0.657 suggests that 65.7% of the variation in performance is explained by stakeholder participation, highlighting its strong predictive power. The regression equation Performance = -0.278 + 1.034(Stakeholder Participation) suggests that a unit increase in stakeholder participation leads to a 1.034 increase in performance, demonstrating a substantial positive effect. The high t-value (13.765) and low p-value (0.000) confirm that stakeholder participation is a statistically significant predictor of performance at $p < 0.05$. However, the negative constant (-0.278) implies that without stakeholder participation, performance would be suboptimal. These findings emphasize the critical role of stakeholder involvement in improving decision-making, resource allocation, and strategic execution in the rice sector. Organizations should focus on enhancing participatory decision-making frameworks, strengthening communication channels, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders to maximize performance. By empowering farmers, policymakers, researchers, and industry players, the sector can achieve greater efficiency, innovation, and sustainable growth.

Table 3: Regression Results for Stakeholder Participation and Performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.810[a]	.657	.653	.628397

a. Predictors: (Constant), Mean_Stakeholder_participation

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	74.822	1	74.822	189.479	.000[b]
	Residual	39.093	99	.395		
	Total	**113.915**	**100**			

a. Dependent Variable: Mean_performance
b. Predictors: (Constant), Mean_Stakeholder_participation

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	-.278	.300		-.927	.356
	Mean_Stakeholder_participation	1.034	.075	.810	13.765	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Mean_performance

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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings confirm that stakeholder participation plays a crucial role in enhancing performance in the rice sector. The strong positive correlation and significant regression results indicate that increased stakeholder involvement leads to better decision-making, resource allocation, and strategic execution. With stakeholder participation explaining a substantial portion of performance variation, it is evident that engaging farmers, policymakers, researchers, and industry players fosters efficiency, innovation and sustainability. Therefore, to maximize performance in the rice sector, organizations should enhance stakeholder participation by implementing inclusive decision-making frameworks, transparent communication channels, and structured collaboration mechanisms. Regular consultations, feedback mechanisms, and participatory governance structures should be established to ensure that farmers, policymakers, researchers, and industry players are actively involved in strategic planning and resource allocation. Additionally, capacity-building programs should be introduced to empower stakeholders with the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute effectively. Strengthening stakeholder engagement will lead to improved efficiency, innovation, and long-term sustainability in the rice sector

Ethics Statement

This study was carried out in accordance with the ethical standards of an institutional and/or a national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Prior to the research, ethical approval was obtained from the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. Every participant was required to read and sign an informed consent form before participating in the research.

Data Availability Statement

The data generated during and/or analyzed during the study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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