

Role Conflict and Psychological Well-Being in School Teachers: A Cross-Sectional Study from Southern India

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: With mental strength being the requisite skill in this knowledge era, rather than physical strength, women seem to flood into every industry on par with men. This shift in the lives of women indeed gives them more confidence and opportunities to identify their assets, but also brings a challenge as they have to perform equally at home and at work. The attempt of working women to integrate, organize and balance the various problems and activities in their different roles simultaneously puts them under tremendous pressure.

Aim: The present study endeavours to gain insight into role conflict and how it influences psychological well-being of school teachers.

Materials and Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted in the government, aided and unaided schools in Udupi, Karnataka. A total of 645 school teachers were interviewed using a self-administered questionnaire. Tools used

were Netemeyer scale for role conflict, Brief COPE inventory for coping mechanism and GHQ-12 for assessing psychological well-being. Univariate and multiple logistic regression analyses were carried out to assess the association between role conflict and major variables in the study. Post-hoc test was used to identify the differences in coping among various groups.

Results: Religion, age of the children and performing school related work on the weekend were found to be significantly associated with role conflict. Gender was not found to influence role conflict in the present study. No significant association was found between role conflict and psychological well-being. Active coping, religion and use of emotional and instrumental support were the most commonly adopted coping mechanisms.

Conclusion: Thus, teachers must be provided a friendly working environment and they must be motivated for their psychological well-being. Stress relieving sessions also would help in balancing the work life.

Keywords: Coping, Teachers, Well-being, Work-life balance

NOTE TO THE AUTHOR: A women oriented Introduction has been given while the title focuses on a school teachers without any gender specification. Please have a look.

INTRODUCTION

Decades ago, women were mostly confined to their kitchens and those who were employed worked in factories, farms or shops. Very few women had the access to good education. Today, education has not only empowered them but also has given them robust careers. With mental strength being the requisite skill in this knowledge era, rather than physical strength, women seem to flood into every industry on par with men. This shift in the lives of women indeed gives them more confidence and opportunities to identify their assets, but also brings a challenge as they have to perform equally at home and at work. In a transitioning society like India, where the traditional roles of women as homemakers and caretakers are deeply entrenched, the work-family balance becomes a challenge for women and their employers. As working women get married, they have additional responsibilities and when they become mothers, they face intensified pressures to sacrifice themselves for their children by providing "intensive parenting", highly involved childrearing and development [1-5]. A working women has to organize and balance various activities simultaneously which leads to stress. It affects their mental and physical health, including loss of appetite, insomnia, overindulgence, and back pains [2,3].

Role Conflict: Work and family characterize the adult life. With the challenging demands of time, energy and commitment, millions of adults often struggle to maintain a balance between their work and family life [6]. A number of concepts describe the link between work and family domains such as 'work-family conflict,' 'work-

family interference,' 'work-life balance,' and 'spillover' [7]. The term Work-Family Conflict (WFC) is a kind of inter-role conflict arising out of work [7]. Demands at work may give rise to WFC making it difficult to get tasks completed relating to one's family which range from childcare, care of the ageing and sick and other household work. Family-to-Work Conflict (FWC) occurs when family roles hold back due to work-related obligations which may include hours of paid work at times accompanied by overtime, work-related travel, and sometimes completing the pending work at home [2,7].

Psychological Well-being: Two models (Scarcity hypothesis and Enhancement hypothesis), explain the relationship between multiple roles and psychological well-being of an individual. The Scarcity hypothesis states that human energy is limited and the conflict out of multiple roles results in guilt and apprehension. Contrarily, the Enhancement hypothesis states that multiple roles bring status, self-esteem, and privileges that compensates for role strain. Teaching is a challenging job, with many teachers often teaching five to six classes a day, preparing lesson plans, and completing assignments and tasks, in addition to their actual classroom responsibilities. Teaching has several expectations and requirements that are not only determined by the teachers themselves but by the school, government, and other stakeholders. Research shows, teachers having high amounts of stress and burnout [8]. Teacher's well-being plays a crucial role as it impacts the institutions where they work as well as their own families. The present study endeavours to gain insight into role conflict and how it influences the psychological well-being of school teachers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted among school teachers in Udupi, Karnataka. Data was gathered between January and March,

2014. The research protocol was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of a tertiary care hospital.

Anticipating prevalence of role conflict to be around 0.5, with absolute precision of 0.05, design effect of 1.5, confidence interval of 95% and a no-response rate of 10%, the sample size estimated was 642. The sampling frame consisted of all government-aided and private schools in Udupi, totalling 659 schools. Government and aided accounted for 177 schools and private 482 schools. A stratified cluster sampling technique was adopted. Stratification was based on the grading of schools. Both male and female teachers were covered. Role conflict in this study was considered as WFC, which is a general conflict between work and family where the directions of conflict (work-to-family/family-to-work) are not separated. Prior permissions were taken from the school authorities. The questionnaires were distributed to the teachers during their convenience after obtaining permission from the Principal/headmaster/headmistress. Teachers were explained the purpose and their role in the research before administering the questionnaire. The researcher took care that no discussion took place between participants during data collection to prevent bias. On an average, it took about 30-45 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Measures: The researcher adopted three scales, WFC Scale by Netemeyer, Boles and McMurrin (1996) [9], Brief COPE inventory by Craver (1997) [10] and GHQ-12 [11] for the assessment of role conflict, coping and psychological well-being respectively. The questionnaires were bilingual, i.e., both in English and Kannada, which is the local language. WFC Scale by Netemeyer, Boles and McMurrin (1996) [9] is a 10 item 7-point Likert scale. The participants were asked to point out the extent to which they agreed with each item. The responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The WFC scores ranged from 10 to 70 and the scores up to 34, 35-59, 60 and above were classified as those having low, medium and high role conflict, respectively.

Brief COPE inventory [10] assesses a broad range of coping responses. It is a 28-item tool which comprised of 14 subscales/domains; self-distraction, active coping, denial, substance abuse, use of emotional support, use of instrumental support, behavioural disengagement, venting items, positive reframing, planning, humour, acceptance, religion, and self-blame. Internal reliability for the 14 subscales range from $\alpha=0.57-0.90$. The responses ranged from 1 (I haven't been doing this at all) to 4 (I've been doing this a lot). Median scores were calculated for each domain.

GHQ-12 comprises 12 items describing mood states, six of which are positively framed and the rest negatively framed [11]. Each item of the GHQ-12 has four possible response options. 0-Better than usual: 1) same as usual; 2) less than usual; 3) much less than usual. Based on the GHQ scores, psychological wellbeing was classified as normal (scores <15), with evidence of distress (scores 15-20) and with severe psychological distress (scores >20).

STATISTICAL METHODS

Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the study variables. Coping was summarized by median scores and inter-quartile range. Univariate and multiple logistic regression analyses were carried out to assess the association between role conflict and major variables in the study. For analysis, medium and high role conflict categories were clubbed and termed as high role conflict. Post-hoc test was used to identify the differences in coping among various groups.

RESULTS

Of the 645 respondents, 146 (22.6%) were men while 499(77.4%) were women. Almost equal number of participants were in the age group of less than 30 and 30-39 years. Education-wise, 271(42%) of the respondents had postgraduate degree. Majority

Characteristics	Frequency (%)
Gender (n= 645)	
Male	146(22.6)
Female	499(77.4)
Marital status (n=645)	
Single, never married	144(22.3)
Currently married	485(75.2)
Divorced/ Widowed/ Separated	16(2.4)
Education status	
SSLC+TCH	119(18.4)
Graduation	255(39.5)
Post graduation	271(42.0)
Religion	
Hindu	517(80.2)
Muslim	12(1.9)
Christian	113(17.5)
Others	3(0.5)
Monthly income INR (n= 604)	
<10,000	204(33.7)
10,000-20,000	184(30.4)
>20,000	216(35.7)
Living arrangement (n=643)	
Single	82(12.7)
Nuclear	544(84.6)
Joint	17(2.6)
Age of children in years (n=461)	
0-6	126(27.3)
7- 12	119(25.8)
13-19	119(25.8)
>19	97(21.0)
Child care (n=378)	
Respondent/ spouse/older child	200(50.2)
Family members in the same house/ else where	124(32.4)
Others	54(13.5)
Age of adults in years (n=564)	
<40	121(21.4)
40- 60	357(63.2)
>60	86(15.2)
Spouse job (n=440)	
No job	76(17.2)
Academics	100(22.7)
Business	61(13.8)
Others	203(46.1)

[Table/Fig-1]: Distribution of respondents based on background characteristics.

of the respondents, 517(80%) were Hindus. Monthly income was almost equally distributed among the participants with 204(33.7%) participants earning less than INR 10,000 per month while 216 (35.7%) participants earned more than INR 20,000 per month [Table/Fig-1]. Majority, 544(84.6%) of the participants lived in a nuclear family setting while about 17(2.6%) of them lived in joint families. Most, 452(88.2%) of them had less than or equal to two children. Half, 200(50.2%) of the participants either themselves or with their spouses took care of their children when they were at work by bringing their children along to their workplace or visiting them during lunchtime and free periods. A third of the respondents, 124(32.4%) reported that other members in the family took turns taking care of their children. The rest 54(13.5%) reported either a maid; friend; relative; or childcare centre took care of their children

Characteristics	Male n (%) (n=146)	Female n (%) (n=499)	Total n (%) (n=645)
Years of experience			
<1	3(2.0)	44(8.8)	47(7.2)
1-5	22(15.0)	133(26.6)	155(24.0)
6-10	28(19.1)	223(44.6)	127(19.6)
>10	93(63.6)	99(19.8)	316(48.9)
Function other than teaching			
Yes	83(56.8)	162(32.5)	245(37.9)
No	63(43.2)	337(67.5)	400(62.0)
Classes taught/day			
<3	12(8.2)	41(8.2)	53(8.2)
>=3	134(91.7)	458(91.7)	592(91.7)
Average no of children in each class			
<30	8(5.5)	62(12.4)*	70(10.9)**
30- 60	135(92.5)	414(83.1)	549(85.2)
>60	3(2.1)	22(4.4)	25(3.9)
Work on the weekend (n=642)			
Never	3(2.1)	37(7.4)	40(6.2)
Rarely	32(22.1)	105(21.1)	137(21.3)
Frequently	58(40.0)	175(35.2)	233(35.8)
All the time	52(35.9)	180(36.2)	232(35.7)
Perceived importance (n=643)			
Paid work	51(34.9)	80(16.1)	131(20.4)
House work	2(1.4)	5(1.0)	7(1.1)
Both	93(63.7)	412(82.9)	505(78.5)
Current work situation (n=644)			
<20 hours a week	13(8.9)	40(8)	53(8.2)
20-30 hours a week	58(39.7)	163(32.7)	221(34.3)
31-40 hours a week	54(37)	186(37.3)	240(37.2)
>40 hours a week	21(14.4)	109(21.8)	130(20.2)

[Table/Fig-2]: Distribution of the respondents based on work characteristics.
* n=498; ** n=644

while they were at work. About 86(15.2%) respondents had adults more than 60 years at home [Table/Fig-1].

Work Characteristics of Respondents: Majority of the participants 318(49.5%) were from the aided schools while 171(26.7%) worked at government schools and 153(23.9%) represented private schools. The majority, 316(48.9%) had been working as teachers for more than ten years. About 245(37.9%) participants reported of having responsibilities other than teaching in the school with most of them taking on additional administrative responsibilities. A good number of teachers 592 (91.7%) reported teaching more than three batches of students per day and the average number of children per class was anywhere between 30 to 60. About 240(37.2%) participants reported of working 31-40 hours per week while 130(20.0) of them worked for more than 40 hours per week. Majority 602(93.3%) of the participants reported taking their school work home on the weekends. About 131(20.4%) of the participants, with men being the majority, 51(34.9%) admitted that paid work was more important to them [Table/Fig-2].

Factors Associated with Role Conflict: [Table/Fig-3] presents the results of distribution of role conflict with various demographic variables. Univariate analysis showed that age of the participants OR 2.42(1.38, 4.24), marital status OR 2.20(1.19, 4.07), religion OR 2.72(1.28, 5.80), age of their children OR 3.52(1.67, 7.41), years of teaching experience OR 12.61(1.70, 93.12), type of school taught OR 2.15(1.29, 3.60) and doing school related work on the weekends OR 6.14(2.84, 13.2) were associated with role conflict.

Variable n(%)	Low role conflict n(%)	High role conflict n(%)	Unadjusted OR	Adjusted OR
Age in years				
<30	160(89.9)	18(10.1)	1	1
30-39	152(87.9)	21(12.1)	1.12(.63, 2.39)	.59(.18, 1.98)
>39	231(78.6)	63(21.4)	2.42(1.38, 4.24)	.80(.19, 3.37)
Gender				
Male	123(84.2)	23(15.7)	1	1
Female	420(84.2)	79(15.8)	1.00(.60, 1.66)	1.42(.69, 2.89)
Marital status				
Single	131(91.0)	103(9.0)	1	1
Married	398(82.1)	87(17.9)	2.20(1.19, 4.07)	.41(.07, 2.08)
Divorced/ widowed/ separated	14(87.5)	2(12.5)	1.44(.294, 7.04)	.30(.02, 3.53)
Religion				
Hindu	428(82.8)	89(17.2)	2.72(1.28, 5.80)	2.71(1.15, 6.38)
Muslim	9(75.0)	3(25.0)	4.37(.98, 19.43)	6.46(1.18, 35.40)
Christian	105(92.9)	8(7.0)	1	1
Living arrangement				
Single	33(78.6)	9(21.4)	1	1
Nuclear	393(84.9)	70(15.1)	1.60(.77, 3.33)	3.12(.21, 45.87)
Joint	117(83.6)	23(16.4)	1.08(.21, 5.51)	3.50(.15, 81.36)
Age of children in years				
0-6	141(82.0)	31(18.0)	1	1
7-12	282(88.4)	37(11.5)	3.52(1.67, 7.41)	3.22(1.21, 8.54)
13-19	120(77.9)	34(22.0)	2.11(.96, 4.62)	1.45(.48, 4.38)
>19	46(97.9)	1(2.1)	3.06(4.13, 6.69)	1.06(.274, 4.13)
Child care				
Respondent/ spouse	137(88.4)	18(11.6)	1.55(.85, 2.80)	1.27(.62, 2.62)
Family members in same house/ elsewhere	112(88.2)	5(11.8)	1	1
Others	248(78.5)	68(21.5)	1.39(.63, 3.09)	1.78(.69, 4.55)
School level				
LP	33(78.6)	9(21.4)	1.53(.70, 3.33)	1.48(.59, 3.67)
LP+UP	393(84.9)	70(15.1)	1	1
S	117(83.6)	23(16.4)	1.10(.661, 1.84)	1.25(.68, 2.30)
Type of school				
Government	141(82.0)	31(18.0)	1.67(.99, 2.81)	.66(.31, 1.39)
Private	282(88.4)	37(11.5)	1	1
Aided	120(77.9)	34(22.0)	2.15(1.29, 3.60)	1.44(.71, 2.88)
Years of experience				
<1	46(97.9)	1(2.1)	1	1
1-5	137(88.4)	18(11.6)	6.04(.78, 46.53)	4.37(.58, 38.73)
6-10	112(88.2)	5(11.8)	6.16(.79, 48.0)	7.97(.88, 72.01)
>10	248(78.5)	68(21.5)	12.6(1.7, 93.12)	8.40(.87, 80.54)
Work on weekend				
Rarely	129(94.2)	8(5.8)	1	1
Frequently All the time	208(89.3)	25(10.7)	2.30(.70, 7.48)	2.12(.83, 5.63)
Responsibility in school other than teaching				
Yes	196(80.0)	49(20.0)	1.63(1.06, 2.50)	1.03(.60, 1.76)
No	347(86.8)	53(13.2)	1	1

[Table/Fig-3]: Multiple logistic regression analysis of role conflict and major variables in the study.

Variable	Normal	Dis-tressed	Unadjusted OR (95% CI)	Adjusted OR (95% CI)
Low role conflict (n= 543)	168(30.9)	375(69.0)	1	1
High role conflict (n=102)	33(32.4)	69(67.7)	0.937(0.59,1.47)	0.963(0.59,1.57)

[Table/Fig-4]: Multiple regression analysis of role conflict and psychological well-being.

Coping	Male (IQR)	Female (IQR)	Mann-Whitney U
Planning	6(5-8)	6(5-7)	
Active coping	6(5-7)	6(5-8)	
Religion	6(4-8)	6(5-8)	
Use of emotional support	6(4-6)	6(5-7)	
Use of instrumental support	6(5-7)	6(5-7)	
Self distraction	5.5(4-7)	5(4-7)	
Positive reframing	5(5-7)	5(4-6)	
Venting	5(4-6)	4(4-6)	
Acceptance	5(4-7)	5(3-5)	
Self blame	5(4-7)	5(4-7)	.008*
Behavioural disagreement	4 (3-5)	4(4-6)	
Denial	4(2-6)	4(2-5)	
Humour	4(4-6)	4(3-5)	.013*
Substance use	2(2-2)	2(2-2)	.001**

[Table/Fig-5]: Distribution of median scores for coping strategies based on gender.

Coping	Median scores for coping			ping Kruskal Wallis test p-value	Mann-Whitney U between Hindus and Muslims	Mann-Whitney U between Muslims and Christians	Mann-Whitney U between Christians and Hindus
	Hindu	Muslims	Christians				
Self distraction	6	5	5	<.001**			<.001**
Active coping	6	6	6	0.015*			0.009**
Acceptance	5	6	5	0.030*	0.031*		0.001**
Self blame	5	5.5	4	0.008*		0.031*	0.014*
Behavioural disagreement	4	5	3	0.027*			0.002**
Humour	4	4	4	0.019*			0.006**
Substance use	2	2	2	0.045*			

[Table/Fig-6]: Differences in coping mechanisms based on religion.

After adjusting for confounding, age of the participants and marital status among the socio-demographic variables were not found to be significantly associated with role conflict. Religion was found to be significantly associated with role conflict ($p < 0.05$) with Hindus and Muslims experiencing role conflict as compared to the Christian respondents. Among the work characteristics, type of school taught and years of experience were not found to be significantly associated with role conflict. However, doing school-related work on the weekends was found to be significantly associated with role conflict ($p < 0.01$). Among the family characteristics, age of children was found to be significantly associated with role conflict ($p < 0.05$) [Table/Fig-3].

Almost half of the males (49.3%) and females (48.3%) had evidence of distress while 18.5% of the males and 20.8% of the females had severe psychological distress, but no significant association was

found between role conflict and psychological well-being [Table/Fig-4]. Median scores were calculated for coping strategies. Active coping, use of emotional support, use of instrumental support, planning and religion were the most commonly adopted coping styles. Mann-Whitney test showed significant differences between male and female teachers in terms of humour, self-blame and substance use [Table/Fig-5].

Since, religion was significantly associated with role conflict in the present study, therefore post-hoc test was performed to see if there were any differences in coping mechanisms among different religious groups. Kruskal Wallis test showed that coping mechanisms significantly varied across different religions in terms of self distraction, active coping, acceptance, self blame, behavioural disagreement, humour and substance use [Table/Fig-6]. Mann-Whitney tests between different groups showed significant differences in terms of acceptance ($p = 0.031$) between the Hindus and the Muslims; significant differences in terms of behavioural disagreement ($p = 0.031$) between the Muslims and the Christians; significant differences in terms of self distraction ($p < 0.001$), active coping ($p = 0.009$), use of emotional support ($p = 0.031$), humour ($p = 0.002$), behavioural disagreement ($p = 0.014$), self-blame ($p = 0.001$) and substance use ($p = 0.006$) between Hindus and Christians. Among the three religions, Christians were the least to use self blame and behavioural disagreement as a coping mechanism. Probably this could be a reason for them to experience lower role conflict as compared to the Hindus and the Muslims.

DISCUSSION

Religion was found to be significantly associated with role conflict, with Hindus 2.71(1.15, 6.38) and Muslims 6.46(1.18, 35.40) having more chance of experiencing role conflict as compared to the Christian respondents in the study. A probable explanation would be the social support available. Christians mentioned of a strong social support from their religious association that helped them in coping up with stressful situations. The present study found significant association between age of the children of participants and role conflict experienced by them. Participants with children in the age group of 7-12 years and higher, experienced more role conflict 3.224(1.217, 8.542) in comparison with those who had children in the age group of 0-6 years. The reason for the association of age of children and role conflict in the present study could be the schooling of the children accompanied with additional responsibilities. Age of the children was found to be positively correlated with work- family conflict in a study by Reddy NK et al., conducted among working women sampled from industrial, school and hospital settings [2]. However, Lee C et al., in their study among 112 full time teaching staff did not find any significant association between presence of children or age of children and the experience of role conflict among the school teachers [12].

Doing school-related work on the weekend was another significant 5.82 (2.42, 14.0) finding in the present study which was not explored in previous studies. After adjusting for confounders, age of the participants was not found to be significantly associated with role conflict. A study by Mahpul IN et al., in their study among 801 employed women across a range of occupation from elementary workers to professionals, reported that age was significantly associated with WFC [13]. Another study by Madhavi C et al., reported higher levels of role conflict among the middle-aged working women employed as software professionals [14]. However, the type of work and stress related to working in corporate settings may also contribute to higher levels of role conflict.

Gender did not influence role conflict in the present study. A meta analysis by Byron reported that sex was not a predominant factor in explaining WFC [15]. A qualitative study by Emslie C et al., in their life course approach among men and women found that regardless of the similarities in the present work and family conditions of men and

women [16], gender remained interwoven in negotiating work and family life. Erdamar G et al., in their study found that female teachers experienced more WFC than the male teachers [17]. Marital status was not found to be significantly associated with role conflict in the current study. On the contrary, a study by Pathak et al., reported that unmarried women with less responsibilities perceived teaching profession convenient for them and did not find any difficulty integrating family responsibilities with work demands [18].

Living arrangement was not to be significantly associated with role conflict in the current study. Pathak N et al., in their study among women teachers in India, reported that women in joint families with many dependents at home found it difficult to manage their work and family life [18]. The present study did not find any significant association between role conflict and the number of dependents. This finding was supported by Balmforth K et al., who in their study among employees at a human resource consultancy did not find significant differences between number of dependents and experience of WFC [19].

Childcare was not to be significantly associated with role conflict in the current study. This finding was contrary to another study by Razak MI et al., which found a significant and positive relationship between parental demand and work interference with family and family interference with work [20]. Mahpul IN et al., also reported that mothers using informal childcare as leaving their children with neighbours or friends, experienced slightly higher role conflict in comparison with those using kinship childcare [13].

The present study did not find any significant association between type of school and role conflict. On the contrary, a study by Erdamar G et al., found that teachers in the private institutions experienced higher role conflict as compared to the others [17]. The probable reason was that teachers working in the government institutions were staffed public servants who did not bother about dismissal. While, teachers working in the private institutions worked on contract basis which was renewed annually based on their performances. Thus, they had to constantly strive for better performance to be able to continue working in the same school.

Experience of role conflict did not differ by school level and years of experience as a teacher in the present study. This finding was consistent with another study by Erdamar G et al., in terms of level of school [17]. However, the latter study found that teachers, who had newly joined, experienced more role conflict. Reddy et al., in their study did not find any significant association between role conflict and years of experience [2]. Role conflict and psychological well-being among the participants were not found to be significantly associated in the present study. In contrast, role conflict and mental health were significantly negatively associated in a study by Panatik SA et al., among academic staff in Malaysia [21].

Work-family conflict was reported as a significant predictor of both job and life stress in a study by Esson PL [22]. Planning, active coping, religion and social support seeking were most commonly used while denial and substance use were the least preferred coping mechanisms in the present study which is consistent with the previous studies conducted by Behera S., et al., and Prasad KDV et al., [23,24]. The present study found significant differences between male and female teachers in terms of self blame, humour and substance use as coping strategies.

CONCLUSION

Teachers' well-being has an impact not only on their institutions but also their own families. Multiple roles and responsibilities require adaptation to minimize conflict and stress. There is scarcity of literature regarding role conflict, its causes and consequences in India. This construct has usually been studied among the working mothers. The present study adds to the literature by exploring the

experiences of both men and women. The amount of interest shown by the participants in the study depicts their desire to know more about WFC and its causes and consequences.

LIMITATION

As any other research, this study is not without limitations. Firstly, the researcher could not find adequate number of male teachers, so gender comparison in terms of WFC remains uncertain. Data collection were carried out in the month of February prior to the exams when teachers were stressed because of their work load. The final limitation is the study's ability to establish causal relationships because of the cross-sectional nature of the study.

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