

# A Study of Sociocultural Adaptation for Practices of Religious Doctrines during the Covid-19 Pandemic and Using the Religious Dimension to Prevent and Mitigate the Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

This article presents the findings of a study on the effects of sociocultural adaptation on religious practices during the COVID-19 pandemic and the utilization of the religious dimension to prevent and mitigate the spread of the virus. The results stem from a mixed-methods research approach involving quantitative and qualitative data collection from 15,505 participants through questionnaires. Statistical analysis comprises numerical summaries such as counts, percentages, means, standard deviations, and qualitative content analysis. Data presentation employed descriptive analytics. Findings revealed: 1) Among Thai followers, a high adherence to religious practices was observed (94.62%). Brahmanism-Hinduism adherents demonstrated the highest adherence (100.00%), followed by Sikhs (94.60%), Muslims (93.60%), Buddhists (92.50%), and Christians (92.43%). 2) Sociocultural adaptation for religious practices during the pandemic aligned with public health guidelines, emphasizing social distancing, mask-wearing, and frequent hand sanitization. 3) Clear directives were established for utilizing religious practices to combat COVID-19, ensuring conformity with the Ministry of Public Health protocols for all religious ceremonies, both auspicious and inauspicious. Additionally, education played a vital role in disseminating these guidelines effectively to religious communities, fostering greater compliance and understanding.

**Keywords:** sociocultural adaptation, religious doctrine practices, COVID-19 pandemic, religious dimension, educational religious guidelines

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduce the Problem

Cultures are a foundation of national security. They signify national identities and can be changed all the time. Quick or late cultural change is up to the social contexts involved. Cultures shape patterns of institutions, that differ in each society; they also shape human behaviors, control societies, and create disciplinary societies. Cultures currently change with time due to broader communication. It is a cause of more cultural diffusion from other countries. In fact, foreign cultures are commonly found in Thai society as they influence teenagers nowadays, i.e., Korean, Japanese, and Western cultures. Thailand has a remarkable identity in terms of religion, art, and culture, with virtuous traditions inherited from our ancestors for a very long time as part of our lives. This can be seen through many people in rituals and traditional events on different festivals/occasions. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and government measures to prevent it, religious/traditional activities are also affected. Temples, religious places, organizations, or agencies cannot set those activities like usual. Even religious followers and general people cannot join rituals or religious activities. Involved agencies focus on this matter and promote religious and traditional missions to be continued in the typical situation. Thus, religious activities must be done according to religious doctrines and appropriate to the original traditions under the New Normal. People can perform rituals and join activities safely (Department of Health, 2020; Ward et al., 2020; Storti, 2022; Classen, 2023; Stokes, 2023).

COVID-19 has spread across all continents worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) announced COVID-19 as a public health emergency of international concern, with a recommendation to all countries for

surveillance and prevention of COVID-19. In Thailand, infected patients have been found, but with the ability to control the situation because we prepared to handle the pandemic efficiently under the Center for the COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA), which announced the COVID-19 pandemic for control and prevention in accordance with the Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situation A.D. 2005. To control and prevent this communicable disease in traditional activities and rituals with the assembly of a large group of people that may cause the risk of spread, “Handbook for Rituals and Traditional Activities under the Prevention of COVID-19” was provided in order to prevent and control the pandemic of this disease (Sanyaolu et al., 2021; Gebru et al., 2021; Papadakis, 2022; Faruk et al., 2023; Atilla & Zwaan, 2024).

Cultural adaptation refers to individual and social behavioral change, which can either adapt to a new environment or change some parts of the environment to suit one’s desire. Most people compare their cultures to their daily lives and roles, which inevitably pressures them to adapt to new cultural systems. Stepping to new cultures and confronting what is different and unfamiliar definitely cause stress that drives individuals’ adaptation. This finally leads to intrinsic growth. According to the concept and theory of Kim (1994) called “stress-adaptation-growth dynamic”, although stepping into new cultures may cause pain and difficulties to individuals, stress at that time provides an opportunity to find new feasibilities inside themselves for creating a new self. For most people, experiences of stress naturally press them to create new habits amidst environmental challenges. They will also try to create their own security by adaptation. Stress resides inside a complex system and requires for an adaptation process that facilitates (new) self-management. Also, creating a new self facilitates profound mental growth (Kim, 2017). Three factors include stress, adaptation, and growth, with development being the drawback to leap direction. To clarify, it refers to drawing back from original shaping for a while to adjust behaviors before moving forward to be shaped for new cultures (Wiwattananukul, 2016; Sit et al., 2020; Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al., 2021; Self, 2023; Gray et al., 2024).

### *1.2 Objectives*

This article aimed to present the results of the study on the effects of sociocultural adaptation for practices of religious doctrines during the COVID-19 pandemic and using the religious dimension to prevent and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **2. Literature Review**

Understanding the intricacies of cultural dynamics is essential for comprehending the mechanisms driving societal evolution and adaptation. This literature review delves into various theoretical frameworks and concepts that elucidate the complexities of cultural change, diffusion, adaptation, and progress. By examining these theoretical perspectives, we gain insights into how societies navigate shifts in their way of life, belief systems, and interactions amidst changing environments and socio-political landscapes.

### *2.1 Cultural Change Concepts*

Samakkarn (1999) described that cultures can be changed. Social change can occur due to social relationships in each particular issue. It can also happen in small parts or significant parts of social relationships. Any small or huge changes are all regarded as social change. Cultural change refers to the change in the living pattern of a group of people who certainly have their own way of life. Practically, it is hard to separate social and cultural change. That is because when any changes occur, those changes always affect both types of change. Supharkerchaisakul et al. (2014) described the characteristics of culture in that a small society of humans that includes a single ethnic group has a single culture and the same way of life. In contrast, a prominent society consists of diverse ethnic groups with different cultural traditions, and specific ways of life in each particular ethnic group. The culture of the major ethnic group, such as the land owner, is regarded as the primary culture. In contrast, the cultures of minor ethnic groups or newcomers are regarded as subcultures. How cultures in a society will change is all up to how, more or less, they are exposed to new things that affect them. Alternatively, they will block those new things and let themselves change gradually within the frame. Rules or prohibitions may limit the scope of change. Besides, cultures also refer to products and objects. Cultures are a broad and deep issue that covers the way of life, norms, values, customs, traditions, beliefs, and thinking systems of human societies. Thus, analysis of cultures must focus on details in all aspects with holistic perspectives. However, the environment and situation at that time must also be considered regarding how much they affect cultures and how they change cultures in which patterns. That is because cultures are indispensable for learning to understand a particular society truly.

### *2.2 Cultural Diffusion Theory*

The concept of Linton (1964) described cultural diffusion as social change due to communication among societies with different cultures, which are diffused from one another. More civilized societies may accept cultures of

inferior societies. Similarly, those inferior societies may not accept the cultures of the more civilized societies. No matter what, cultural diffusion is also dependent on an individual's behaviors. Boas (1940) describes cultural diffusion as a process that combines the key characteristics of a particular culture with another, with adaptation to be in accordance with that new culture. Thus, this theory focuses on a historical process to describe cultural change called "historical particularism." Cultural diffusion theory helps describe approaches and steps of cultural transfer from one culture to another under consideration of similarities and dissimilarities in both cultures.

### *2.3 Cultural Adaptation Concepts and Theories*

Cultural adaptation refers to confronting an unfamiliar culture and entering the adaptation process for easier living with understanding and a comfortable feeling. According to the studies of Black and Mendenhall (1990), Bennett and O'Brien (1994), Earley and Peterson (2004), and Jia and Rutherford (2010), there are the following critical issues related to cultural adaptation. 1) Studies on cultural adaptation should consider components of art and culture, and sociocultural societies as a way of life and beliefs. 2) Cultural components comprise of a holistic culture with unique characteristics in each sociocultural society. 3) Interactions with societies nearby or the discovery of new things in their own societies bring adjustment for the survival of those sociocultural societies. 4) Cultures refer to a symbolic system in which each component contains deeper and broader meanings and interpretations than facts. 5) Humans must live in groups. Sociocultural adjustment basically occurs within groups rather than individuals. Cultural inheritance must be done from generation to generation in groups. Thus, cultural adaptation refers to adjustment in groups. 6) Human behaviours are flexible and changeable. No behaviours cannot be adjusted at all. 7) Cultural inheritance from generation to generation includes similar processes, steps, and cultures. It partly smoothens efficient and quicker adaptation. Likewise, good attitudes of newcomers toward new places also create good adaptation and social acceptance.

### *2.4 Cultural Progress Theory*

The energy everyone utilizes each year refers to technology or the efficiency of tools, i.e., the degree of cultural development.

### *2.5 Cultural Lag*

It views cultural change as always causing late adaptation, finally resulting in cultural inertia or lag.

Situations, environments, efficiency, and sociocultural adaptation related to rituals during the COVID-19 pandemic and using the religious dimension to prevent and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic include some issues for analysis and presentation to reveal the results for rituals of each religion under the frame of control measures against the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **3. Method**

The population and samples in this survey included people aged  $\geq 13$  years of all religions in the database of 55,094,365 religious' followers in 2021 (Central Registration Office, Department of Provincial Administration, 2021). There were 15,505 samples in the survey. The questionnaire was used as a survey tool. Data analysis was divided into two parts, i.e., 1) quantitative data from the questionnaire about practices of religious doctrines in Christianity, Islam, Brahmanism-Hinduism, and Sikhism was analyzed by descriptive statistics, i.e., number, percentage, mean, and S.D.; presented in tables and figures. 2) Qualitative data was analyzed for situations, environments, efficiency, and sociocultural adaptation for religious activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the religious dimension was used to prevent and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic. Content analysis was used, and the data was presented by descriptive analytics.

## **4. Results**

The results of sociocultural adaptation for practices of religious doctrines during the COVID-19 pandemic and using the religious dimension to prevent and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic were divided into parts as follows.

### *4.1 Practices of Religious Doctrines*

According to practices of religious doctrines among Thai followers, it was found that the overall followers practiced religious doctrines (94.62%). When considering each religion, it was found that the total followers of Brahmanism-Hinduism practiced religious doctrines (100.00%), implying that they were strict with practices of religious doctrines most, followed by the followers of Sikhism (94.60%), followers of Islam (93.60%), Buddhists (92.50%) and the followers of Christianity (92.43%), respectively; as in Tables 1 and 2, and Figure 1.

Table 1. Practices of religious doctrines, classified by religions

Practices of religious doctrines	Overall	Buddhism	Islam	Christianity	Brahmanism-Hinduism	Sikhism
Practices of religious doctrines (%)	94.62	92.50	93.60	92.41	100.00	94.60

Table 2. Mean and S.D. of Practices of religious doctrines

Practices of religious doctrines	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
Buddhism	2.18	0.41	Occasionally/Not regularly
Islam	2.41	0.49	Occasionally/Not regularly
Christianity	2.40	0.53	Occasionally/Not regularly
Brahmanism-Hinduism	2.53	0.45	Regularly
Sikhism	2.50	0.51	Regularly
Total	2.22	0.43	Occasionally/Not regularly

Note.  $\bar{x}$  = 2.50-3.00 referred to regular practices religious and doctrines;  $\bar{x}$  = 1.50-2.49 referred to occasional/no regular practices of religious doctrines;  $\bar{x}$  = 1.00-1.49 referred to rare/no practices of religious doctrines.

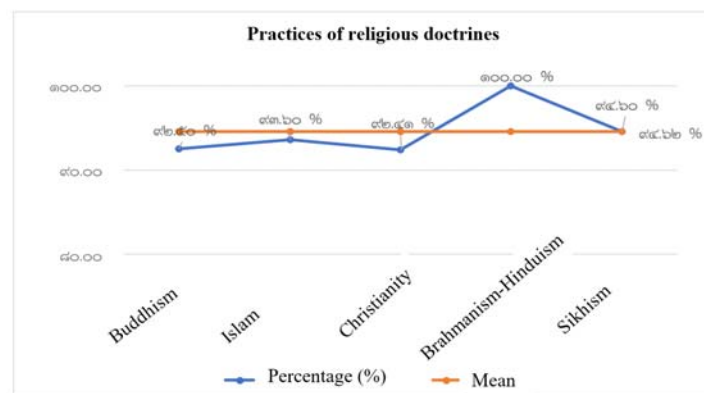


Figure 1. Practices of religious doctrines

#### 4.2 Sociocultural Adaptation

According to sociocultural adaptation for practices of religious doctrines during the COVID-19 pandemic and using the religious dimension to prevent and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic, the results are presented in Figures 2 and 3.

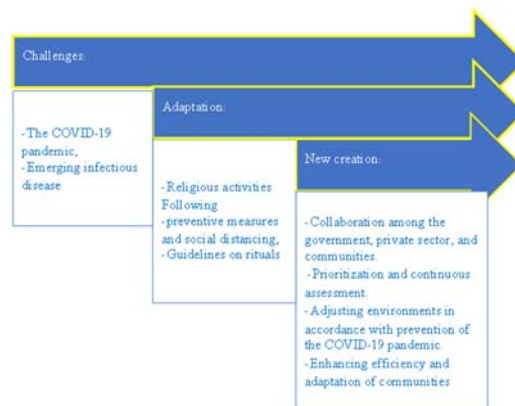


Figure 2. Sociocultural adaptation for practices of religious activities during the COVID-19 pandemic

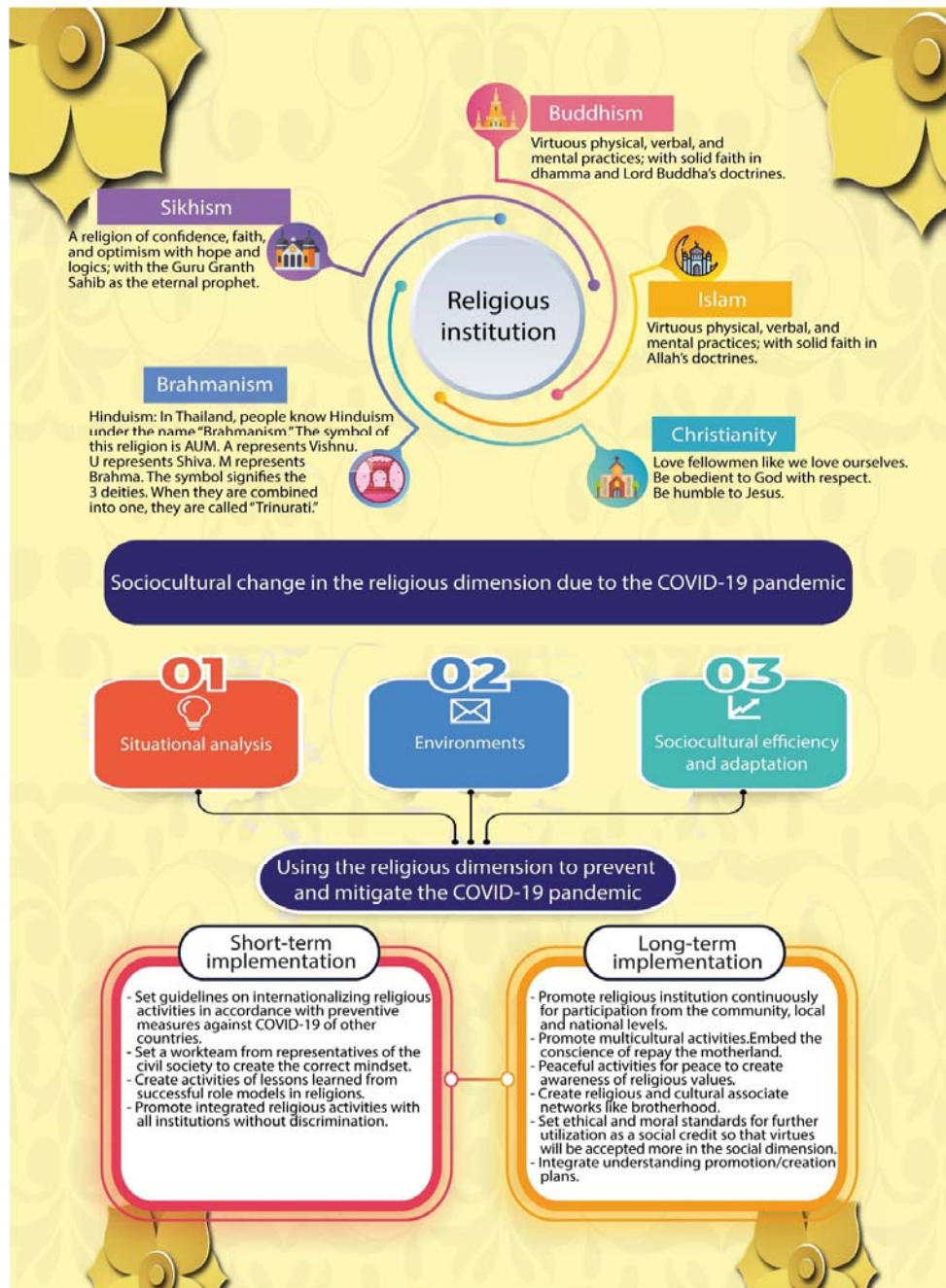


Figure 3. The sociocultural change in the religious dimension due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Sociocultural adaptation for practices of religious doctrines during the COVID-19 pandemic included the following actions.

- 1) Sociocultural adaptation for practices of religious doctrines during the COVID-19 pandemic was in accordance with the preventive measures of public health agencies.
- 2) Religious practices of each religion must be done under social distancing, surgical masks, and using hand cleansing gel all the time.
- 3) For the religious dimension to prevent and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic, unambiguous guidelines on rituals of all religions during the COVID-19 pandemic were set. They must be in accordance with the measures of the Ministry of Public Health for all auspicious and inauspicious rituals.

## 5. Discussion

Sociocultural adaptation for practices of religious doctrines during the COVID-19 pandemic and using the religious dimension to prevent and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic can be discussed as follows.

According to practices of religious doctrines among Thai followers, it was found that the overall followers practiced religious doctrines (94.62%). When considering each religion, it was found that the total followers of Brahmanism-Hinduism practiced religious doctrines (100.00%), implying that they were strict with practices of religious doctrines most, followed by the followers of Sikhism (94.60%), followers of Islam (93.60%), Buddhists (92.50%) and the followers of Christianity (92.43%), respectively. In all regions, more followers practiced religious doctrines because most of them used religious doctrines as a spiritual anchor, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which followers of all religions took their religions as spiritual anchors. As a result, the number of followers who practiced religious doctrines increased by 94.62%. This implied the critical roles of religious doctrines related to life skills. The results conform to the research of Sodmanee and Chanprasert (2011), who studied “Moral Principles and Ethical Development: From Concept to Practical Approach.” They found that moral and ethical development through life skills processes referred to necessary socialization in accordance with sociological concepts using various socialization representatives, i.e., monks, teachers, lecturers, parents, and friends. Thus, there should be strategies to promote moral and ethical development in the society. The results also conform to the research of Koh (1991), who studied *The Development of Moral Reasoning in Singaporean Youth*, revealing the significance of implementing strategies to promote moral development in juveniles for inclusive drive to Singaporean citizens and the moral study project in order to provide choices for students with different values and capabilities amidst quick changes of the geographical society. The project aimed to develop core values: courtesy, responsibility, morality and ethics, caring, flexibility, and harmony. The design strategy was used, along with knowledge transfer related to morality, awareness of morality, and moral actions, until becoming skills and values at the international level to create a spiritual anchor for humans and to pave the way to peace.

According to sociocultural adaptation for practices of religious doctrines during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was found as follows. 1) Sociocultural adaptation for practices of religious doctrines during the COVID-19 pandemic was in accordance with the preventive measures of public health agencies. 2) Religious practices of each religion must be done under social distancing, surgical masks, and using hand cleansing gel all the time. 3) For using the religious dimension to prevent and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic, unambiguous guidelines on rituals of all religions during the COVID-19 pandemic were set and must be in accordance with the measures of the Ministry of Public Health for all auspicious and inauspicious rituals. Situations, environments, and efficiency were analyzed, along with sociocultural adaptation for practices of religious doctrines during the COVID-19 pandemic and using the religious dimension to prevent and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic, not cause any long-term effects that could destroy systems of countries worldwide. Thus, the government and agencies involved in all countries set guidelines on religious activities during the COVID-19 pandemic and adjusted lifestyles for people. This conforms to the concept of Maitra (2020), Open Government Partnership (2020), Pueyo (2020), and United Nations (2020), who mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic. The governments of different countries issued measures or regulations under the state of exception or the state of emergency such as “quarantines” and “social/physical distancing” in restricted areas and fixed durations to reduce the pandemic. Those measures were semi-compulsory and semi-volunteering that enormously changed human living. Thus, there were guidelines on religion and using the religious dimension to prevent and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic. These guidelines were from leaders, gurus, priests, or scholars of different religions amidst the COVID-19 pandemic because the religious institution includes religions campaigned by international agencies, e.g., UNICEF, WEFORUM, WHO, and Religions for Peace (RFP) to encourage religious leaders to show their role in the COVID-19 pandemic inhibition. The three religions were connected with the concept of the Abrahamic Faith (Elsanousi et al., 2020).

Education emerges as a critical component in fostering adherence to public health measures and promoting an understanding of the intersection between religious practices and societal well-being. By disseminating guidelines and facilitating dialogue between religious leaders and communities, education catalyzes for informed decision-making and collective action in addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic. In accordance with the World Health Organization (2021), principles for educational engagement with governments, religious leaders, and faith-based organizations are established, focusing on human rights, data-driven strategies, and community responsibility. Collaborative roles include developing educational materials, combating misinformation, ensuring fair access to healthcare, and enhancing community resilience. The WHO supports faith partners in developing educational resources, advocating for funding, and building capacity. Religious leaders and organizations contribute by providing guidance on education and mental health, delivering educational services, and communicating information that aligns with both scientific evidence and religious values.

## 6. Conclusions

According to sociocultural adaptation for practices of religious doctrines during the COVID-19 pandemic and using the religious dimension to prevent and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic, this dimension had a key influence on setting ethics that indicated what was right, what should be done, and what can/cannot be done. That was because religions included key roles and were a center of beliefs and faith among followers of religions. Religions were a spiritual anchor, and thus they were used as an influential institution to set followers' lifestyles in all aspects, including their habits and health to join ritual until this finally led to sociocultural adaptation for practices of religious doctrines during the COVID-19 pandemic in accordance with the preventive measures of public health agencies.

## 7. Suggestions

### 7.1 Policy Suggestions

- 1) The religious institution should develop its active roles to reach the target group in various patterns. Religions should be used as a tool to develop a quality of life for good life skills and for living with other people appropriately, with correct problem-solving approaches.
- 2) Involved agencies should promote practices of religious doctrines and use them as a tool to develop, shape, or be a spiritual anchor for people, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which most people take religion as a spiritual anchor.
- 3) The government and involved agencies should set guidelines and measures for people's adaptation to practice religious activities with safety.
- 4) Religious institutions and religious leaders educate people about replaceable practices of religious doctrines during the COVID-19 pandemic. No need to travel to religious places with a large number of people.

### 7.2 Suggestions for Further Implementation

- 1) Sociocultural adaptation for practices of religious doctrines during the COVID-19 pandemic was in accordance with the preventive measures of public health agencies.
- 2) Religious practices of each religion must be done under social distancing, surgical masks, and using hand cleansing gel all the time.
- 3) For using the religious dimension to prevent and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic, unambiguous guidelines on rituals of all religions during the COVID-19 pandemic were set and must be in accordance with the measures of the Ministry of Public Health for all auspicious and inauspicious rituals.

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## Authors' contributions

The author was solely responsible for the conception, design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the study.

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Obtained.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

#### **Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

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