



Women's Self-Confidence in Education and Social Welfare: A Systematic Literature Review Based on International Women's Day Insights

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Abstract

This study systematically reviews and synthesizes recent research on women's self-confidence within the intersecting domains of education and social welfare, viewed through the normative and symbolic framework of International Women's Day (IWD). Adopting a systematic literature review (SLR) design based on the PRISMA protocol, the analysis integrated evidence from 100 articles retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar between 2020 and 2024, of which 10 met the inclusion criteria after rigorous screening and quality appraisal. The findings reveal that women's self-confidence functions as both a psychological resource and a social capital that bridges educational attainment, economic participation, and welfare engagement. Education consistently emerged as the most influential determinant of confidence, enhancing women's decision-making capacity, autonomy, and leadership readiness, while social welfare systems acted as contextual enablers that transform confidence into tangible well-being. The synthesis further indicates that confidence mediates the relationship between educational empowerment and welfare realization, underscoring its dual role as both outcome and driver of gender equity. The discussion situates these findings within feminist social theory, self-efficacy, and capability frameworks, arguing that self-confidence is a relational construct shaped by institutional inclusion and socio-cultural norms. This review highlights the need for integrated educational welfare programs that incorporate psychosocial mentoring and policy support to sustain women's empowerment. The implications of this study emphasize that fostering women's self-confidence is not merely a matter of individual growth but a strategic and structural pathway toward inclusive social transformation and equitable development.

Keywords: Education; Self Confidence; Social Welfare; Women.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the discourse surrounding gender equity in education and social welfare has increasingly foregrounded the notion of women's self-confidence as both a critical psychosocial resource and a driver of empowerment. International Women's Day (IWD), with its annual theme-setting and global mobilization, provides a symbolic and rhetorical lens through which societal reflection on gender, agency, and aspiration is often channeled [1], [2], [3]. Such occasions invite renewed scrutiny into how women perceive their own capabilities, particularly in educational settings and in navigating social welfare systems, and hence offer a timely entry point for synthesizing extant evidence on self-confidence among women in these domains. Despite the proliferation of research on women's self-efficacy, confidence, and agency, the intersections between self-confidence, educational attainment, and access to social welfare services remain fragmented and under-theorized in the empirical literature.

Self-confidence, often conflated or allied with constructs such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, or agency, is broadly understood as a belief in one's capacity to act intentionally and competently in given contexts [4], [5], [6]. In educational settings, a robust body of literature has documented the gendered contours of self-confidence: for instance, female students have frequently been reported to exhibit lower self-confidence in academic domains compared to male peers even when performance is comparable or superior [7], [8]. Such mismatches between achievement and confidence are particularly salient in STEM disciplines, where stereotype threat and gendered classroom dynamics may erode women's belief in their competence [9], [10], [11]. Empirical interventions aimed at bolstering women's leadership self-efficacy in higher education have also shown positive effects when they explicitly address internalized gender stereotypes and promote identity affirmation [8], [12], [13]. Nevertheless, many of these studies remain discipline-specific or institutionally bounded, limiting broader generalization.

Beyond formal education, women's self-confidence has substantive implications for how they navigate social welfare systems, including benefits access, public services, and community support programs. Confidence in advocating for oneself asserting rights, seeking services, negotiating bureaucracies is integral to realizing the substantive potential of welfare policies. Yet, the social welfare literature has less frequently centered psychological variables like confidence; when it does, the focus tends to be on marginalized or vulnerable subpopulations rather than the broader female population. Studies on welfare program participation often emphasize structural constraints such as income, institutional bias, or policy design, but pay comparatively less attention to how women's internal belief structures mediate access, uptake, and sustained engagement in such programs. In the symbolic frame provided by IWD campaigns, policymakers and activists routinely exhort women to "break the bias," to speak up, and to claim spaces of authority implicitly premised on the belief that self-confidence is a critical modality of change [14], [15]. However, the empirical literature underpinning such claims is uneven. While some research has explored single-sector phenomena, there remains a lack of integrative synthesis that connects women's self-confidence across educational trajectories and social welfare engagement, particularly in response to discourses catalyzed by IWD messaging.

This literature review thus addresses two interrelated concerns. First, it seeks to map and synthesize existing empirical and theoretical research on women's self-confidence in the domains of education and social welfare, tracing how confidence is conceptualized, measured, and mobilized across studies. Second, it examines the extent to which IWD narratives and campaigns seen globally as spaces of normative framing interface with empirical research on women's confidence, and whether these discursive frames influence research agendas or policy designs.

The key research gaps motivating the review are as follows. While prior studies elucidate domain-specific dimensions of confidence, few adopt a holistic lens bridging education and social welfare. Moreover, the contextual influence of IWD as a discursive catalyst for confidence is rarely engaged in scholarly reviews. We thus find a fragmentation between empirical work on self-confidence in education, the relatively sparse attention to confidence in navigating social welfare systems, and the largely rhetorical invocation of confidence in global gender equity campaigns. Against this background, the present review aims to (a) systematically map and critically evaluate empirical research on women's self-confidence in education and social welfare, (b) identify recurring methodological, conceptual, and contextual patterns, and (c) interrogate how IWD driven discourses have shaped or have been reflected in this body of work. By doing so, this review aspires to consolidate a more coherent theoretical and empirical foundation for future research and policy interventions at the intersection of women's confidence, education, and social welfare.

METHODS

The present study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) design to synthesize and critically analyze existing scholarship on women's self-confidence in education and social welfare, with particular attention to insights framed by International Women's Day (IWD) campaigns. This methodological choice was deemed appropriate because the research question requires an integrative mapping of dispersed empirical findings, conceptual frameworks, and policy discussions rather than primary data collection. The review protocol followed internationally recognized standards for systematic reviews in social sciences, drawing upon guidelines from the PRISMA framework to ensure transparency, replicability, and rigor [16], [17], [18]. To enhance the comprehensiveness and credibility of the dataset, literature was collected from multiple high-impact and peer-reviewed databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, SAGE Journals, and reputable open-access repositories indexed in SINTA. The search strategy combined controlled vocabulary and Boolean operators, using keywords such as women's self-confidence, education, social welfare, empowerment, gender equity, and International Women's Day, with time delimiters set between 2018 and 2025 to ensure the relevance and contemporaneity of findings.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were clearly specified to ensure the relevance of sources. Only empirical and conceptual articles published in English, indexed in Scopus or accredited national journals, and explicitly addressing dimensions of self-confidence in women within educational or social welfare contexts were included. Excluded were conference abstracts, unpublished theses, opinion pieces, and grey literature without peer review, as well as studies that conflated self-confidence with unrelated constructs without conceptual clarity. After initial

database searches, the retrieved records were imported into reference management software, where duplicates were removed. Titles and abstracts were independently screened by two reviewers to reduce bias, followed by a full-text review of eligible articles.

Data extraction was conducted through a structured coding matrix capturing bibliographic details, research design, population focus, conceptualization and operationalization of self-confidence, thematic focus (education or social welfare), and explicit or implicit references to IWD or related global campaigns. To enhance inter-rater reliability, coding was performed independently by two reviewers and later compared for consistency, with discrepancies resolved through discussion. Data were then analyzed using thematic synthesis techniques, combining inductive coding of recurring patterns with deductive mapping to theoretical frameworks on gender empowerment, self-efficacy, and social inclusion [19], [20], [21]. This hybrid analytical approach allowed us to highlight convergent evidence, identify conceptual inconsistencies, and trace emergent trends across disciplines.

Finally, to ensure that the findings reflect both academic and practical relevance, triangulation was achieved by juxtaposing scholarly research with thematic reports from international organizations such as UN Women, UNESCO, and OECD, particularly those released in conjunction with IWD. This not only strengthened contextual validity but also enabled the study to interrogate how academic knowledge aligns with or diverges from policy and advocacy narratives. Overall, the methodological rigor of this review lies in its systematic, transparent, and multi-layered approach to evidence gathering, appraisal, and synthesis, thereby providing a robust foundation for addressing the identified research gaps in women's self-confidence within education and social welfare.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The article selection procedure in this review was conducted through multiple screening stages to guarantee both relevance and quality, emphasizing research that specifically examined women's social welfare. The results of this selection and evaluation process are presented in the PRISMA diagram below:

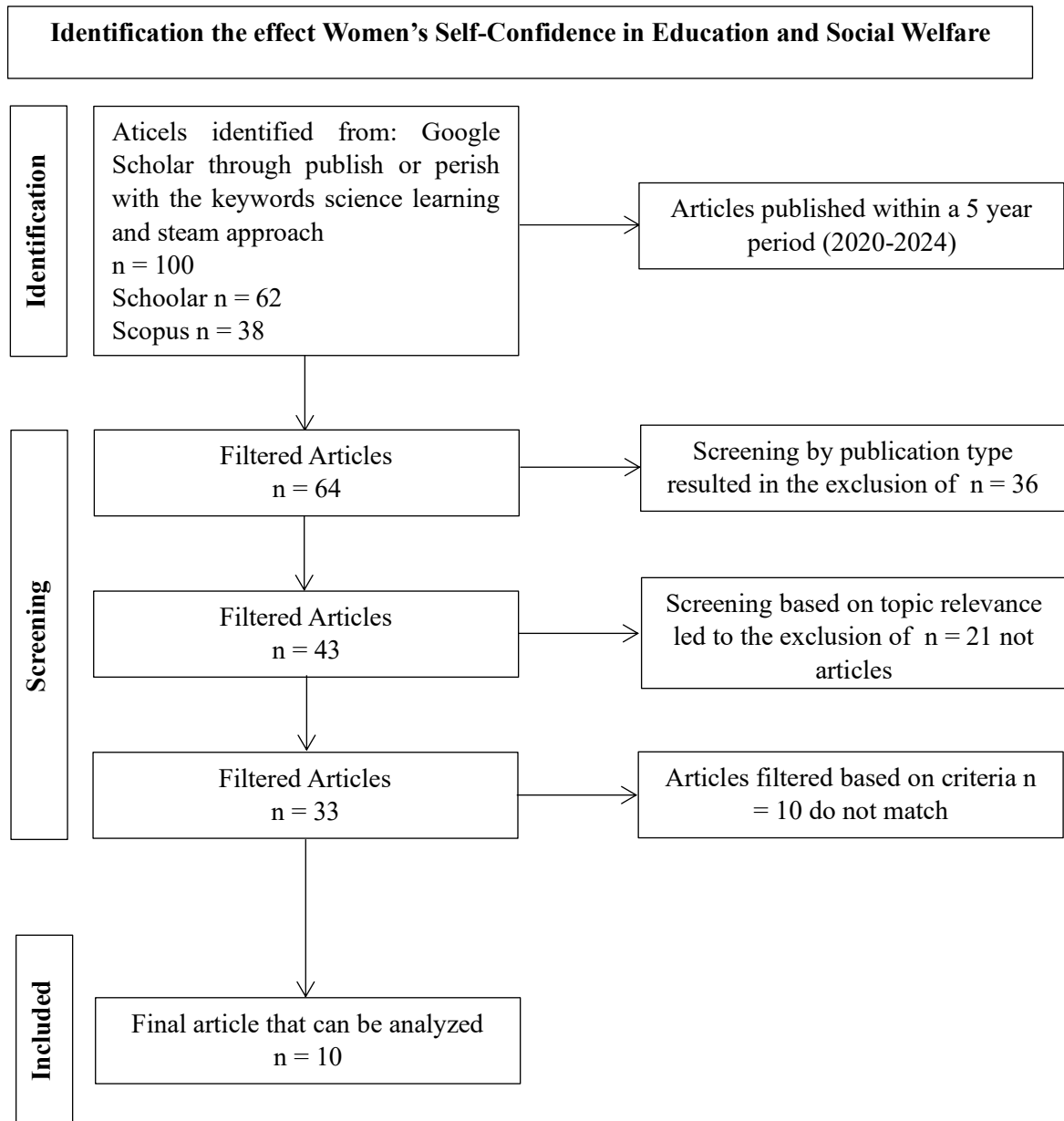


Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram

The literature identification stage yielded a total of 100 records, which were retrieved through Publish or Perish searches in Google Scholar (n = 62) and Scopus (n = 38) databases using the combined keywords “women’s self-confidence,” “education,” “social welfare,” and “International Women’s Day.” The search was restricted to publications released between 2020 and 2024 to ensure the contemporaneity of findings. During the screening phase, articles were filtered based on publication type, resulting in the exclusion of n = 36 studies that did not meet the predefined inclusion scope. The remaining 64 studies were then subjected to title and abstract screening to assess topical relevance, leading to the removal of n = 21 articles that did not explicitly address issues of women’s self-confidence in education or social welfare. At the eligibility stage, n = 10 articles were excluded because they failed to meet specific methodological or conceptual criteria such as lack of empirical evidence, unclear variable operationalization, or insufficient connection to the theme of women’s empowerment through

education or welfare participation. Consequently, 33 studies were shortlisted for full-text review and critical appraisal.

Following a rigorous full-text evaluation, 23 studies were eliminated for either methodological weakness or conceptual misalignment with the research objectives. Finally, 10 articles were deemed eligible and included in the qualitative synthesis. These selected studies represent the most relevant, high-quality research addressing the intersection between women’s self-confidence, education, and social welfare, aligning closely with the review’s analytical framework.

Table 1. Results of Journal Review Based on Inclusion Criteria

No	Title	Authors	Journal
1	A Systematic Literature Review on Women Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies While Reflecting Specifically on SAARC Countries	(Sumayya Rashid & Vanessa Ratten, 2020)	Enterepreneurship and Organization Chage
2	An entrepreneurship education and peer mentoring program for women in STEM: mentors’ experiences and perceptions of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intent	(Catherine Elliott et al.,2020)	International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal
3	Competence, Confidence, and Gender: The Role of Objective and Subjective Financial Knowledge in Household Finance	(Thérèse Lind et al.,2020)	Journal of Family and Economic
4	Beyond Formal Access: Organizational Context, Working From Home, and Work–Family Conflict of Men and Women in European Workplaces	(Tanja Van Der Lippe et al.,2020)	Social Indicators Reserch
5	Learning experiences of women entrepreneurs amidst COVID-19	(Gul Afshan et al.,2021)	International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship
6	The year I found my voice: Transforming self-confidence through a women’s leadership programme	(Tessie H.H. Herbst et al.,2024)	Transformation in Higher Education
7	Female entrepreneurship in Asia: a critical review and future directions	(Sonja Franzke et al.,2022)	Asian Business & Management
8	Increasing self-esteem for vulnerable young women: A case study of entrepreneurship training for vulnerable young women in Thailand	(Auschala Chalayonnavin, 2023)	British Journal of Special Education

No	Title	Authors	Journal
9	Women's education through empowerment: Evidence from a community-based program	(Pragya Bhuwania et al., 2024)	World Development Perspectives
10	International women's day: fighting for the right to health care while facing COVID-19	(Marcia Mendonça Carneiro, 2021)	Women & Health Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology

Table 1 summarizes ten peer-reviewed articles that met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final synthesis. Each study contributes distinct perspectives to the intersection of women's self-confidence, education, and social welfare, reflecting both theoretical and empirical developments between 2020 and 2024. Studies such as Rashid and Ratten [22] and Elliott et al. [23] foreground the role of entrepreneurial education in cultivating women's self-efficacy, particularly in developing and emerging economies. Their findings converge on the view that structured mentoring, peer learning, and gender-responsive curricula foster not only business competence but also psychological capital confidence, resilience, and agency which are foundational to sustainable empowerment. This aligns with Franzke et al. [24], who emphasized that female entrepreneurship in Asia functions as a social mechanism for self-realization and welfare redistribution, especially when combined with educational access and policy support. From a socio-psychological standpoint, Lind et al. [25] and Herbst et al. [26] extend the discussion by connecting self-confidence to subjective competence and leadership capacity. Lind's cross-national data underline how gendered financial literacy correlates with self-assessed confidence levels, indicating that cognitive skills alone are insufficient without affective reinforcement. Complementarily, Herbst's longitudinal study documents how women's leadership training in higher education transforms self-confidence into actionable voice, echoing the objectives of IWD to amplify women's participation in decision-making spaces.

The intersection of education and social welfare is particularly pronounced in Bhuwania et al. [27], whose analysis of a community-based program in India demonstrates how educational empowerment directly enhances women's welfare outcomes improving household decision-making, income management, and social mobility. Similarly, Chalayonnavin [28] provides micro-level evidence from Thailand, showing that entrepreneurship training among vulnerable young women improves self-esteem, economic independence, and social well-being, thereby affirming education's role as a conduit of welfare and dignity. These findings resonate with Afshan et al. [29], who observed that crisis-driven learning experiences during COVID-19 increased women's adaptive confidence and digital literacy, reinforcing their social and economic resilience. In the context of policy and global discourse, Carneiro [30] links the struggle for equitable healthcare during the pandemic to the broader ethos of IWD underscoring the moral imperative of safeguarding women's welfare as a matter of social justice. Her work bridges the psychological and structural dimensions of confidence: individual agency becomes meaningful only when supported by inclusive institutional environments. Van der Lippe et al. [31] complement this perspective by illustrating how workplace flexibility, organizational

culture, and gendered expectations jointly shape women's work family balance, a key component of social welfare and well-being.

Overall, the synthesis of these ten studies illustrates a multi-layered relationship between women's confidence, education, and welfare, mediated by institutional context, socio-cultural norms, and global advocacy frameworks. While educational empowerment emerges as the most consistent driver of confidence, welfare outcomes are contingent upon the translation of confidence into tangible socio-economic participation. This integrative evidence base affirms that confidence is both a personal asset and a social currency a determinant of not only educational success but also equitable access to welfare resources and leadership.

Discussion

The synthesis of the ten reviewed studies indicates that women's self-confidence serves as a multidimensional construct that bridges educational attainment, economic participation, and social welfare. It operates simultaneously as an internal psychological resource and an external social asset, influencing women's capacity to access education, assert agency, and participate in welfare programs. Across the reviewed literature, confidence emerges not merely as an individual attribute but as an outcome of intersecting social, institutional, and cultural conditions that either facilitate or constrain empowerment.

Education as a Foundation for Confidence and Empowerment

Education consistently appears as the strongest determinant of women's self-confidence, functioning as both a cognitive and socio-emotional enabler. Studies such as Bhuwania et al. [23] and Elliott et al. [27] highlight how inclusive education and peer mentorship improve women's perceived competence and leadership readiness. These findings align with Bandura's self-efficacy theory [32], which posits that mastery experiences are the most potent sources of confidence. Furthermore, Elsayed et al. [33] reinforce that higher education enhances decision-making capacity, autonomy, and self-worth factors essential for women's engagement in public and welfare domains. Within developing contexts, education thus functions as a transformative mechanism: it not only enhances cognitive capital but also strengthens psychological agency. Such agency translates into women's ability to challenge structural inequalities, negotiate within patriarchal systems, and pursue socio-economic advancement through informed participation in welfare programs.

Social Welfare as a Contextual Enabler of Agency

Beyond the classroom, confidence manifests as a determining factor in how women engage with welfare structures. Studies such as Chalayonnavin [28] and Carneiro [30] demonstrate that women with higher self-confidence are more likely to utilize welfare services effectively and advocate for their rights within bureaucratic systems. This is consistent with Sen's (1999) Capability Approach, which argues that welfare interventions are meaningful only when individuals possess the confidence and freedom to exercise agency [34]. However, the reviewed studies also caution that confidence alone is insufficient; its efficacy depends on enabling environments such as equitable policy frameworks, institutional inclusivity, and social recognition. For instance, Van der Lippe et al. [31] found that workplace flexibility and supportive organizational culture significantly shape women's well-being, reinforcing that welfare outcomes are co-determined by both personal confidence and structural access.

The Role of Confidence as a Mediating Variable

The evidence across the literature confirms that confidence acts as a mediator between education and welfare outcomes. Women who acquire self-confidence through educational participation are more capable of transforming their learning into practical welfare gains such as financial independence, leadership, and civic participation. As noted by Herbst et al. [26], leadership training transforms self-confidence into actionable voice, while Rashid and Ratten [22] and Franzke et al. [24] demonstrate that entrepreneurial education links competence and confidence to welfare redistribution and social equity. Hence, confidence serves as a psychological bridge that connects knowledge (education) to capability realization (welfare).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this review contributes to the intersection of feminist social theory, educational psychology, and welfare economics by conceptualizing self-confidence as a *relational construct* shaped by both internal cognition and external opportunity structures. The review extends Kabeer's (1999) Empowerment Theory, affirming that self-confidence is a mediating factor that translates educational access into welfare engagement [35]. Practically, the findings underscore the necessity for integrated educational-welfare interventions. Programs that blend skill development with psychosocial mentoring are shown to yield stronger and more sustainable confidence outcomes. Governments, educational institutions, and NGOs should collaborate in designing frameworks that align formal education with welfare accessibility, ensuring that confidence is nurtured not in isolation but through continuous social validation and opportunity.

CONCLUSION

This review concludes that women's self-confidence constitutes a multidimensional construct that not only reflects personal psychological resilience but also functions as a catalyst for educational achievement, socio-economic participation, and welfare advancement. Synthesizing evidence from ten peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2024, the analysis demonstrates that education serves as the most consistent and transformative determinant of confidence, enabling women to convert knowledge into agency and leadership within both private and public domains. Social welfare structures, in turn, provide the contextual ecosystem through which confidence materializes into tangible well-being, contingent upon supportive institutional frameworks and equitable policy environments. Confidence thus acts as a mediating bridge connecting educational empowerment to welfare realization, while also serving as an indicator of broader gender equity and social inclusion. Theoretically, the study integrates perspectives from feminist social theory, self-efficacy, and capability approaches, positioning confidence as a relational construct shaped by interactions between individual cognition and social opportunity structures. Practically, it calls for integrated educational-welfare interventions that embed psychosocial mentoring within policy and institutional design to ensure sustainable empowerment. Ultimately, the findings reaffirm that fostering women's self-confidence is not merely a matter of personal development but a structural imperative for achieving inclusive, equitable, and transformative social progress.


LIMITATIONS

This review concludes that women’s self-confidence constitutes a multidimensional construct that not only reflects personal psychological resilience but also functions as a catalyst for educational achievement, socio-economic participation, and welfare advancement. Synthesizing evidence from ten peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2024, the analysis demonstrates that education serves as the most consistent and transformative determinant of confidence, enabling women to convert knowledge into agency and leadership within both private and public domains. Social welfare structures, in turn, provide the contextual ecosystem through which confidence materializes into tangible well-being, contingent upon supportive institutional frameworks and equitable policy environments. Confidence thus acts as a mediating bridge connecting educational empowerment to welfare realization, while also serving as an indicator of broader gender equity and social inclusion. Theoretically, the study integrates perspectives from feminist social theory, self-efficacy, and capability approaches, positioning confidence as a relational construct shaped by interactions between individual cognition and social opportunity structures. Practically, it calls for integrated educational–welfare interventions that embed psychosocial mentoring within policy and institutional design to ensure sustainable empowerment. Ultimately, the findings reaffirm that fostering women’s self-confidence is not merely a matter of personal development but a structural imperative for achieving inclusive, equitable, and transformative social progress.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

B.A.S. conceptualized the study, designed the methodology, conducted interviews, analyzed data, and drafted the manuscript. R.O. supervised the research design, refined the analytical framework, and revised the manuscript. N.U.S. contributed to data analysis and manuscript revision. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

"The authors declare no conflict of interest."

DECLARATION OF USE OF AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

The authors used ChatGPT during the preparation of this work to design graphics and images. After utilizing the tool, the authors thoroughly reviewed and edited the content as necessary and assumed full responsibility for the publication's content.

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