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Research Article

Gender-Responsive Islamic Sexuality Education: A Comparative Study of Ulwan and At-Tihami

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Abstract

This study examines Islamic sexuality education through a comparative analysis of Abdullah Nasih Ulwan's *Tarbiyat al-Awlad fi al-Islam* and Muhammad At-Tihami's *Qurrat al-'Uyun*. Using qualitative document-based research, the study analyzes each scholar's views on the aims, content, developmental orientation, and social function of sexuality education. The findings show that both perspectives frame sexuality education as a value-based process integrating religious literacy, moral formation, bodily awareness, self-protection, and responsible family relationships. Ulwan emphasizes a developmental and preventive approach, including privacy etiquette, modesty, age-appropriate guidance, puberty education, separation of sleeping arrangements, and protection from harmful sexual stimuli. In contrast, At-Tihami situates sexuality education primarily within marital ethics, relational responsibility, emotional intimacy, and family well-being. The study's novelty lies in integrating these complementary perspectives into a gender-responsive Islamic safeguarding framework that connects child and adolescent protection with healthy marital and family life. The findings suggest that Islamic Religious Education can provide culturally grounded guidance for preventing sexual violence, strengthening bodily autonomy, and promoting responsible sexuality education in families, schools, and community-based religious institutions.

Keywords: Islamic Sexuality Education; Safeguarding; Gender-Responsive Education; Family Well-Being; Islamic Religious Education (IRE); Abdullah Nasih Ulwan; Muhammad At-Tihami.

INTRODUCTION

Sexual and gender-based violence remains a critical social-welfare and educational concern because it compromises bodily safety, psychosocial well-being, participation in education, and the capacity of families to provide care. Indonesia's official service records reported 12,161 cases of violence against women and 19,628 cases of violence against children during 2024, while the national annual report also documented 330,097 cases of gender-based violence from multiple reporting channels. These records must be interpreted as reported incidents rather than a full prevalence estimate; nevertheless, they signal the urgency of prevention, safe disclosure pathways, and educational responses that do not leave children, adolescent girls, or women to manage risks alone [1], [2].

In Indonesia, sexuality education is frequently contested because the topic is treated as morally sensitive, culturally private, or feared as an invitation to sexual activity. Earlier Indonesian scholarship instead frames sexuality education as guided learning about bodily development, instincts, marriage, reproductive responsibility, and the prevention of harmful consequences. This orientation is consistent with psychological and family-life perspectives that connect sexual knowledge with moral reflection, health, and responsible social relations rather than with mere biological description [3], [4], [5], [6], [7].

The need for a protective educational approach is not confined to any one national setting. Meta-analytic evidence shows that child sexual abuse and other forms of maltreatment are global concerns, and population-based research documents that violence against women persists across regions. These patterns make it inadequate to approach sexuality only as a private matter or an individual moral problem; it must also be understood through safeguarding, gendered power, and social-welfare responsibilities [8], [9], [10].

A substantial evidence base indicates that well-designed sexuality education can improve knowledge, attitudes, communication, and safer decision-making without producing the feared escalation in sexual activity. The most useful programmes integrate accurate information with skills for judgment, relationships, communication, and protection. Accordingly, a values-based framework should not be assessed by whether it is explicit or restrictive in isolation, but by whether it equips learners with age-appropriate understanding, practical safety capacities, and access to supportive adults and services [11], [12], [13].

The safeguarding literature reinforces this requirement. School-based child sexual-abuse prevention programmes can strengthen protective knowledge and self-protective skills, yet their effectiveness should never be interpreted as transferring responsibility for abuse from adults and institutions to children. Prevention requires capable adults, safe organisations, responsive reporting procedures, and protection from blame or retaliation. These concerns are especially salient for girls and for learners whose safety may be shaped by age, gender, disability, dependency, or unequal authority relations [14], [15], [16], [17].

Families are indispensable to this agenda because parent-adolescent communication is associated with safer sexual-health behaviour, and parental interventions can improve the quality and frequency of conversations about sexuality. However, communication must be more than one-directional warning. It needs language that is respectful, developmentally calibrated, and able to address privacy, bodily boundaries, digital exposure, consent-related respect, help-seeking, and health. Religious meaning can support such dialogue when it is

linked to compassion, responsibility, and justice rather than silence or stigma [18], [19], [20], [21].

Islamic education offers a potentially important cultural and ethical resource for this work. Its educational tradition places moral formation, responsibility before God, the cultivation of character, and the social purpose of learning at the centre of pedagogy. Yet contemporary safeguarding requires careful interpretive work: classical texts should be read historically and analytically, not treated as ready-made substitutes for modern child-protection standards, survivor-centred practice, gender equality, or referral systems [22].

Research on violence prevention likewise cautions that individual knowledge is insufficient when harmful gender norms, unequal power, institutional silence, and weak services remain unaddressed. Effective prevention therefore combines personal capability with relational change, community norms, and accountable systems. This creates a productive space for revisiting Islamic pedagogical texts: not to claim that historical authors used contemporary rights language, but to examine whether their concepts can inform culturally grounded, gender-responsive education when translated through present-day safeguarding principles [23], [24].

This article addresses that task through a comparative reading of Abdullah Nasih Ulwan's Tarbiyat al-Aulad fi al-Islam and Muhammad at-Tihami's Qurrat al-Uyun. The study asks: (1) What pedagogical, protective, and relational concepts of sexuality education are articulated in the two texts? (2) Where do the texts converge and differ across the life course? and (3) How can their insights be translated responsibly for contemporary Islamic Religious Education (IRE), family communication, safe schools, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), and social-welfare practice? The article contributes a life-course, gender-responsive framework that connects child and adolescent safeguarding with marital and family well-being, while clearly distinguishing textual description from contemporary normative application.

METHODS

Research Design and Analytical Position

This study used qualitative comparative document analysis. The design was selected because the research question concerns concepts, norms, and pedagogical propositions embedded in authoritative texts rather than the numerical prevalence of attitudes or behaviours. Documentary study is appropriate when written texts are treated as situated social and intellectual artefacts whose meanings are reconstructed through systematic reading, categorisation, comparison, and interpretation. In the Indonesian education literature, descriptive-analytical study has also been used to examine values, ideas, and pedagogical propositions in written sources [25], [26], [27].

The analysis is interpretive rather than doctrinal. It does not claim that either classical author formulated contemporary legal or professional standards for gender equality, sexual consent, child protection, or trauma-informed referral. Instead, it identifies concepts in the primary texts and then develops an explicit contemporary translation. This distinction prevents historical anachronism while allowing careful dialogue between Islamic educational thought and current safeguarding obligations.

Document Corpus and Inclusion Logic

The primary corpus consisted of Tarbiyat al-Aulad fi al-Islam by Abdullah Nasih Ulwan and Qurrat al-Uyun by Muhammad at-Tihami, in the editions available to the researcher. These works were selected purposively because the first gives sustained attention to child development, family pedagogy, privacy, gaze, sleeping arrangements, puberty, and moral self-regulation, while the second places sexuality within marriage, household responsibility, intimacy, and family harmony. Secondary Indonesian works were used only to clarify local reception and terminology, whereas peer-reviewed research was used to interpret the contemporary relevance of the documentary findings.

Table 1. Documentary Corpus and Analytic Role

Document	Status in analysis	Analytic focus	Role in findings
Tarbiyat al-Aulad fi al-Islam (Ulwan)	Primary text	Developmental education; privacy; gaze; sleeping arrangements; puberty; self-regulation	Source for the child and adolescent safeguarding strand
Qurrat al-Uyun (At-Tihami)	Primary text	Marriage; family functions; relational ethics; economic responsibility; reproductive responsibility	Source for the marital and family well-being strand
Indonesian explanatory sources	Secondary contextual sources	Terminology, local reception, and pedagogical framing	Contextual clarification; not treated as primary textual evidence
Contemporary peer-reviewed and official sources	Interpretive context	Safeguarding, gendered violence, sexuality education, family communication, and qualitative rigor	Used to translate and critically delimit contemporary implications

Coding and Comparative Procedure

Analysis proceeded in five iterative stages. First, both primary texts were read repeatedly to identify passages addressing sexuality, bodily development, family roles, protection, and relational conduct. Second, an initial deductive coding frame was prepared around developmental stage, educator or caregiver role, learning content, ethical boundary, protection mechanism, and expected welfare outcome. Third, open coding was used to capture concepts not fully anticipated by the frame, such as emotional calm, household responsibility, and contextual flexibility. Fourth, codes were grouped into themes and entered into a cross-text comparison matrix. Fifth, each theme was subjected to a contemporary interpretive check: whether it could be translated into safeguarding without overstating what the original text directly says [28], [29], [30], [31].

The final comparison was organised around four questions: Who is the learner or relational subject? What educational content is prioritised? Which actors carry responsibility?

and What form of safety or well-being is sought? This procedure enabled the analysis to preserve differences between the texts while also identifying a coherent life-course relationship between them.

Trustworthiness, Ethics, and Limitations of the Method

Trustworthiness was strengthened through transparent documentation of the corpus, explicit coding domains, comparison across two primary texts, retention of disconfirming interpretations, and a clear separation between textual findings and contemporary recommendations. The analysis followed established guidance on thematic coherence, auditability, and qualitative reporting. Because the study involved publicly available texts and no human participants, formal human-subject approval was not required. Ethical care was nevertheless applied to avoid reproducing harmful or explicit content unnecessarily and to avoid presenting interpretive conclusions as religious rulings. The study's main methodological limits are its single-author coding process, dependence on the selected editions and translations, and the absence of interviews with women, adolescents, parents, IRE teachers, pesantren leaders, or safeguarding practitioners [32], [33], [34], [35], [36], [37].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Ulwan: Developmental Safeguarding Through Privacy, Boundaries, and Puberty Literacy

Ulwan treats sexuality education as a continuous process of moral and developmental formation rather than a discrete lesson on reproduction. The architecture of his argument begins before puberty and is organised around the child's gradual encounter with privacy, bodily difference, social boundaries, and responsibility. His central pedagogical concern is not the delivery of technical sexual information in isolation, but the cultivation of dispositions and environments that enable a child to recognise limits, ask questions appropriately, and enter maturity with greater self-understanding and self-control [38], [39].

The first cluster of findings concerns privacy and permission. Ulwan's discussion of requesting permission before entering private family spaces positions the home as an educational setting in which children learn that bodies, rooms, and intimate family moments have boundaries. In a contemporary safeguarding translation, this is relevant not because a child must be trained to police adults, but because privacy education can provide language for bodily autonomy, personal space, safe and unsafe secrets, and the right to seek help when a boundary is crossed. The implied responsibility lies primarily with parents and caregivers, who must model privacy, predictable routines, and respectful responses to children's questions [39].

The second cluster is visual and media-related ethics. Ulwan's discussion of adab al-nazar, or ethical looking, develops attention to what is seen, how it is interpreted, and whether it provokes objectification or harmful desire. Read historically, this is a moral-formation principle. Read in a contemporary educational environment, it can be translated into media literacy: recognising sexualised, exploitative, deceptive, or coercive content; understanding that online images can be manipulated and redistributed; and learning that another person's dignity is not reducible to visual consumption. The safeguard is therefore not only restriction, but critical judgment supported by adult guidance [39].

The third cluster concerns the transition to puberty. Ulwan identifies a period in which educators should explain signs of biological maturity and associated religious practices. This creates an opening for puberty literacy that includes menstruation, nocturnal emission, personal hygiene, bodily changes, emotional uncertainty, and the practical implications of ritual cleanliness. The educational value of this approach lies in reducing confusion and shame. However, contemporary application must ensure that puberty information is medically accurate, non-stigmatising, inclusive of both girls and boys, and accompanied by access to trusted adults and health services when needed [38], [39].

Table 2. Ulwan's Developmental Components and Contemporary Safeguarding Translation

Textual component	Developmental purpose	Contemporary safeguarding translation	Responsible actors
Privacy and permission	Awareness of household privacy and respectful boundaries	Body autonomy, personal-space vocabulary, safe/unsafe secrets, and help-seeking	Parents, caregivers, IRE teachers, safeguarding focal points
Ethical looking (adab al-nazar)	Moral regulation of visual attention and social interaction	Digital-media literacy, anti-objectification, critical understanding of sexualised content	Parents, schools, pesantren, youth educators
Separated sleeping arrangements and environmental guidance	Formation of modesty, safety, and developmental awareness	Age-appropriate privacy, safe sleeping arrangements, supervision without intrusive surveillance	Parents and residential-care institutions
Puberty-related religious guidance	Preparedness for biological maturity and religious responsibility	Medically accurate puberty, menstrual, hygiene, and emotional-health education	Families, IRE teachers, health educators
Self-regulation and moral reflection	Internal restraint and responsible conduct	Reflective decision-making combined with non-violence, respect, and clear access to support	All adult duty bearers

At-Tihami: Marital Relational Ethics and Family Well-Being

At-Tihami's Qurrat al-Uyun locates sexuality primarily within marriage and family life. Its analytic centre is not the developing child but the adult relationship, the household, and the responsibilities that make intimacy ethically meaningful. The text therefore offers a complementary rather than duplicate perspective to Ulwan's work: where Ulwan emphasises preparation before maturity and marriage, At-Tihami elaborates how relational responsibility may sustain affection, tranquillity, and household continuity after marriage [40].

A prominent finding is the integration of sexual relations with broader family functions. The text links intimate life to religiosity, mutual responsibility, household learning, protection, economic provision, and reproduction. This integrated approach is analytically valuable

because it resists the reduction of sexuality to either biological drive or moral prohibition. At the same time, contemporary gender-responsive interpretation requires an explicit refinement: family harmony cannot be invoked to silence a woman's discomfort, excuse coercion, or prioritise household appearance over safety. Well-being requires mutual dignity, voluntary participation, non-violence, and a realistic ability to obtain support [40].

A second finding concerns relational preparation and etiquette. At-Tihami emphasises cleanliness, emotional readiness, kindness, and the avoidance of harshness in marital intimacy. The historical vocabulary does not map perfectly onto contemporary professional terms. Nevertheless, it supplies an ethical entry point for teaching communication, mutual respect, emotional reciprocity, and shared responsibility within a lawful relationship. In contemporary premarital and family education, these topics should be integrated with information on reproductive health, conflict management, financial planning, mental well-being, and pathways for help when relationships become unsafe [40].

Table 3. At-Tihami's Family-Well-Being Components and Contemporary Translation

Family-well-being component	Meaning in the text	Contemporary gender-responsive translation	Practice implication
Religious responsibility	Marriage and intimacy are embedded in ethical accountability	Faith-informed dignity, fairness, compassion, and non-violence	IRE and premarital education should link values to concrete protective conduct
Educational function of family	Household is a formative site for moral and relational learning	Parent and partner communication; non-stigmatising question-and-answer spaces	Family learning sessions and trusted-facilitator dialogue
Protective function	Household stability and protection from harmful influences	Safeguarding, confidentiality, referral awareness, and rejection of victim blaming	Institutional reporting routes and service partnerships
Economic responsibility	Halal provision and material stability support household calm	Financial inclusion, shared planning, and attention to economic dependency as a safety issue	Social-welfare and livelihood support linked to family education
Reproductive responsibility	Continuation of family line within marriage	Informed health decisions, respectful care, and equitable access to services	Health-referral information and couple communication
Relational etiquette	Kindness, preparation, respect, and reciprocal care	Mutual dignity, clear communication, voluntary participation, and non-coercion	Premarital, marital, and counselling programmes

Convergences, Differences, and an Integrated Life-Course Model

The comparison reveals a complementary life-course structure. Ulwan's framework is predominantly preventive and developmental: it prepares children and adolescents to

understand privacy, bodily change, social boundaries, and moral self-regulation. At-Tihami's framework is predominantly relational and constructive: it locates sexuality within marriage, mutual care, household responsibility, and family continuity. The two texts converge in viewing sexuality as ethically consequential and socially embedded. They differ in their primary learner, timing, institutional emphasis, and immediate welfare outcome [39], [40].

The integrated model derived from the comparison contains three linked layers. The first is developmental safeguarding, which provides children and adolescents with age-appropriate language for bodies, privacy, boundaries, puberty, media exposure, and help-seeking. The second is relational learning, which prepares adults for respectful communication, reciprocal care, economic and reproductive responsibility, and non-violent household practices. The third is institutional accountability, which locates responsibility beyond the individual and family in schools, pesantren, health services, and social-welfare agencies. This third layer is a contemporary addition generated by the analysis; it is not attributed directly to either classical author.

Table 4. Comparative Matrix and Integrated Implications

Dimension	Ulwan	At-Tihami	Integrated implication for IRE and social welfare
Primary subject	Child and adolescent	Adult spouses and household members	A life-course curriculum from childhood through family formation
Immediate objective	Prevention, moral formation, and preparedness for puberty	Relational harmony, responsibility, and family continuity	Safety and well-being across developmental transitions
Key content	Privacy, gaze, sleeping arrangements, puberty, boundaries	Marriage, communication, care, livelihood, reproduction, etiquette	Age-appropriate safeguarding plus relational and family-welfare education
Main duty bearers	Parents and educators	Spouses and families	Families, IRE teachers, pesantren leaders, safeguarding officers, and service providers
Protection mechanism	Environmental guidance and internal self-regulation	Ethical reciprocity and household responsibility	Protection plus referral-aware institutional accountability
Critical contemporary refinement	Avoid shame, surveillance, or child-responsibilisation	Reject coercion and the use of harmony to conceal harm	Explicit bodily autonomy, non-violence, safe disclosure, and survivor-centred support

Discussion

The findings indicate that Islamic sexuality education can be reconstructed as a social-protection and family-well-being project when its historical concepts are placed in dialogue with contemporary evidence. The central contribution is not a claim that Ulwan or At-Tihami

anticipated modern safeguarding frameworks. Rather, the contribution lies in a carefully delimited translation: Ulwan provides a developmental vocabulary for privacy, boundaries, puberty, and moral self-regulation; At-Tihami provides a relational vocabulary for care, communication, household responsibility, and marital well-being. Together, these strands support a life-course model that begins with child and adolescent protection and extends to adult relational ethics and family welfare [39], [40].

This interpretation is consistent with the international evidence that effective sexuality education is multidimensional. Programmes are most defensible when they connect knowledge with values, communication, relationships, critical judgment, and practical protection. The comparison adds a culturally grounded dimension to this evidence base by showing that a values-oriented Islamic framework need not remain confined to prohibition. It can frame sexuality as an area of ethical responsibility, human dignity, health, and social welfare. This is particularly important where communities may reject programmes perceived as externally imposed, yet still need clear and reliable pathways to information and protection [11], [12], [13], [22].

The Ulwan strand has strong relevance for child and adolescent safeguarding. Privacy education, appropriate permission practices, puberty literacy, and critical reflection on visual exposure can be translated into learning outcomes that are recognisable to contemporary schools and child-protection systems. However, the translation must avoid a serious error common in prevention discourse: treating children as responsible for preventing abuse. Modern evidence supports protective-skills education, but it also makes clear that adults, institutions, and communities must carry the larger responsibility for safe environments, fair reporting, and intervention. For this reason, IRE lessons on personal boundaries should be accompanied by named trusted adults, confidential reporting channels, a clear referral protocol, and a commitment that disclosure will not generate blame or punishment [14], [15], [16], [17].

The At-Tihami strand extends the analysis from prevention to relational well-being. His attention to preparation, kindness, emotional calm, and family functions provides an ethical counterweight to approaches that address sexuality only through risk. Yet the contemporary interpretation must be explicit that respectful intimacy is incompatible with coercion, intimidation, or the silencing of discomfort. Marital education in Muslim communities should therefore include reciprocal communication, reproductive-health information, financial responsibility, conflict resolution, and links to legal, health, psychosocial, and social-welfare support. The point is not to privatise violence inside the family under the language of harmony, but to make family well-being inseparable from safety, mutual dignity, and practical access to help [10], [40].

The gender-responsive dimension of the model is essential. Sexual and intimate-partner violence do not arise solely from insufficient knowledge; they are also sustained by unequal gender norms, authority imbalances, economic dependency, and institutional silence. Consequently, interventions should not focus exclusively on girls' modesty, vigilance, or self-restraint. They must also educate boys and men about dignity, accountability, non-violence, and respectful communication; engage parents and religious leaders; and strengthen institutional procedures that recognise women and children as rights-bearing participants. This approach resonates with gender-transformative prevention research, which stresses the need to work across individual, relational, community, and structural levels [10], [23], [24].

The model also clarifies the role of IRE. Rather than treating IRE as a single information-delivery subject, schools and pesantren can organise it as a safe pedagogical space for moral reasoning and practical protection. Developmentally calibrated modules can cover private and public boundaries, puberty, hygiene, digital exposure, respectful interaction, safe/unsafe secrets, help-seeking, and the ethical duty to protect others. Educators should use accurate and non-stigmatising language, distinguish religious ethics from medical advice, and collaborate with counsellors and health professionals. In residential Islamic boarding schools, the same principles require explicit child-protection policies, staff codes of conduct, accessible complaints mechanisms, gender-sensitive accommodation arrangements, and referral partnerships with local services [14], [18], [19], [20].

Family communication is a second major implication. Evidence on parent-adolescent communication suggests that meaningful dialogue is associated with safer outcomes, yet fear, embarrassment, and lack of vocabulary can make communication superficial or punitive. The present model offers a bridge: Ulwan's emphasis on gradual education can guide parents to begin early and respond to developmental cues, while At-Tihami's relational ethics can orient communication toward empathy, care, and responsibility. Parent programmes should therefore include supervised discussion prompts, myth correction, guidance on digital-media conversations, and protocols for responding calmly and protectively when a young person reports discomfort, harassment, or abuse [18], [19], [20], [39], [40].

The study's novelty lies in four features. First, it reads the two classical works together as complementary life-course resources rather than as isolated religious texts. Second, it joins child and adolescent safeguarding with marital and household well-being, thereby avoiding a fragmented view of sexuality education. Third, it distinguishes faithfully between textual propositions and present-day interpretive additions, reducing the risk of anachronistically equating historical ethical language with current professional standards. Fourth, it relocates responsibility from the individual learner to a network of duty bearers: family, IRE teachers, pesantren leaders, schools, social-welfare services, and health providers. This networked approach is especially relevant for women, girls, and children whose access to safety depends on whether adults and institutions respond effectively [8], [10], [22].

The findings should nevertheless be used with care. A document-based analysis cannot establish the effectiveness of a curriculum, the acceptability of particular terminology, or the experiences of diverse Muslim women, men, adolescents, and survivors. The model is a conceptual and pedagogical proposal, not a claim of causal impact. Its next step should be participatory co-design with students, parents, IRE teachers, pesantren communities, women's organisations, counsellors, and safeguarding practitioners. Such work can determine which concepts are understandable, culturally acceptable, trauma-informed, and actionable in Indonesian educational and social-welfare settings [27], [32], [37].

CONCLUSION

This comparative document analysis shows that Ulwan and At-Tihami provide complementary, rather than competing, resources for Islamic sexuality education. Ulwan contributes a developmental and preventive architecture centred on privacy, bodily boundaries, media awareness, puberty literacy, and moral self-regulation. At-Tihami contributes a

relational and family-well-being architecture centred on marriage, communication, mutual care, economic responsibility, reproductive responsibility, and household harmony. The synthesis supports a life-course approach that begins with age-appropriate safeguarding and continues through adult relational and family education. The proposed gender-responsive framework does not treat classical texts as substitutes for contemporary safeguarding standards. Instead, it translates their ethical insights into practical responsibilities for families, IRE, schools, pesantren, health services, and social-welfare institutions. Its core implication is that sexuality education becomes protective when moral formation is combined with accurate knowledge, bodily autonomy, non-violence, safe disclosure, accessible referral, and institutional accountability. Future research should test the framework through participatory curriculum design, educator training, family interventions, and implementation studies that include the voices of women, adolescents, and safeguarding practitioners.

LIMITATIONS

This study is limited by its reliance on two classical texts and selected editions, which means that the findings cannot represent all Islamic scholarly traditions or all contemporary Muslim interpretations. The coding and synthesis were conducted by a single researcher, creating a possibility of interpretive bias despite the use of a transparent matrix and trustworthiness procedures. The study also does not include field data from students, families, women, religious leaders, or survivors, and it does not evaluate an implemented curriculum. Therefore, the proposed model should be understood as a conceptual framework for contextual adaptation and empirical testing rather than as evidence that a particular programme is already effective.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

"The authors declare no conflict of interest."

DECLARATION OF USE OF AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

The authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) for language refinement, structural editing, and improving the readability of the manuscript. After using the tool, the authors critically reviewed and revised all content, verified the cited sources, and assumed full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final form of the manuscript.

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