

The Moderating Role of Ego Depletion in the Relationship between Moral Integrity and Psychological Well-being

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Abstract. Psychological well-being is influenced by moral and self-regulatory processes, particularly in religious and cultural contexts. This study examined the effects of moral integrity and ego depletion on psychological well-being and tested the moderating role of ego depletion. Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from 247 Muslim undergraduate students of Sundanese ethnicity. Moderation analysis using a general linear model indicated that moral integrity positively predicted psychological well-being, whereas ego depletion negatively predicted psychological well-being. Although the interaction effect was relatively small, further analyses using simple slopes and the Johnson-Neyman technique revealed that ego depletion conditioned the strength of the relationship between moral integrity and psychological well-being, with stronger effects observed at higher levels of ego depletion. These findings suggest that moral integrity remains a protective factor for psychological well-being, particularly under conditions of increased self-regulatory demands. The study highlights the importance of considering self-regulatory fatigue when examining the psychological benefits of moral integrity in religious populations.

Keywords: Moral Integrity, Psychological Well-Being, Ego Depletion, Muslim Students, Sundanese Ethnicity

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Introduction

Psychological well-being (PWB) is a key component of human function. This state reflects both positive emotions and the ability to operate effectively in daily life. Accordingly, the concept holds importance across many domains, including family life, education, work, and social settings. Dhanabhakyan and Sarath (2023) presented the essential role of psychological well-being in the achievement of health and happiness. According to a prior exploration, positive psychology has shifted focus from mental health issues to factors promoting optimal functioning and human flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

World Health Organization (WHO) defines positive mental health as a state where people can handle the stress of life, recognize personal abilities, work productively, and contribute to the community (WHO, 2001). Psychological well-being remains multilayered, comprising both emotional and functional aspects. For instance, Huppert (2009) described psychological well-being as a mix of positive feelings and effective functioning, while Deci and Ryan (2000) emphasized a connection to autonomy,

competence, and relatedness. Ryff and Keyes (1995) broke psychological well-being down into six key areas, namely self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, mastery of the environment, personal growth, and having a purpose in life. These areas emphasize that well-being extends beyond mere happiness to include concerns related to living a meaningful, goal-directed life. Other investigations have reported that persons with a clear sense of meaning and purpose often possess higher psychological well-being (Steger et al., 2006).

Numerous factors influence psychological well-being, including personality traits, social relationships, culture, religious beliefs, and self-regulation processes (Wissing & Temane, 2008). The impact of these elements can vary across different contexts, as cultural and religious backgrounds shape how individuals see meaning, values, and life goals. In many societies, moral and religious beliefs significantly guide behavior and self-assessment. Previous studies suggested that a strong sense of morality could give people meaning and coherence, a factor that positively affects personal well-being (Garcia et al., 2018). However, the effect of

morality on psychological well-being does not remain the same for everyone or in every situation.

This study focuses on moral integrity, a specific moral idea capable of influencing psychological well-being in certain contexts. Moral integrity implies not merely possessing moral beliefs but also acting consistently with those principles and internal convictions (Arvanitis & Kalliris, 2020; Carter, 1996). Peterson and Seligman (2004) viewed integrity as a key character strength reflecting honesty, authenticity, and harmony between values and actions. Accordingly, Schlenker (2008) elucidated that integrity represented one of the most respected virtues in different cultures. Moral integrity gains particular relevance in situations where individuals attempt to live by deeply held ethical or religious values.

Moral values functioning as the core of a person's identity make moral integrity even more important for psychological well-being. In this context, Aquino and Reed (2002) and Hardy and Carlo (2011) reported that moral identity could affect psychological outcomes when morality forms part of self-perception. In accordance with self-determination theory, Deci and Ryan (2000) suggested that values integrated into individual identity increased autonomous motivation and psychological health. As a result, moral integrity functions as a form of moral regulation promoting inner coherence and self-consistency. This form of coherence is related to higher psychological well-being, specifically in areas such as having a purpose in life, self-acceptance, and positive relationships (Ryff, 1995).

To maintain moral integrity, individuals must engage in ongoing self-regulation to keep actions in line with personal moral standards. Baumeister (2002, 2014) discussed self-regulation as a process that relied on limited psychological resources, making people vulnerable to ego depletion when exerting self-control repeatedly. Ego depletion leads to a temporary drop in self-regulatory ability due to sustained effort (Baumeister et al., 2024). Because moral integrity requires monitoring thoughts, feelings, and actions against moral standards, the process inherently necessitates self-control. Sticking strictly to moral principles might, as a result, increase the risk of experiencing ego depletion in certain situations.

Ego depletion negatively impacts various psychological outcomes, such as emotional control, decision-making, prosocial behavior, and forgiveness (Balliet & Joireman, 2010; Bishop, 2017; Xu et al., 2012; Zhou et al., 2021). It is important to state that this state has also been associated with increased negative emotions and lower well-being (Baumeister, 2002; Tice et al., 2001). The reviewed studies suggest that ego depletion can reduce the positive effects of psychological traits or values on health. Therefore,

even if an individual possesses strong moral integrity, depleted self-regulatory resources may limit the ability to enjoy the associated psychological benefits. This theoretical view invariably positions ego depletion as a potential moderating factor rather than just a direct predictor.

Recent updates in ego depletion theory emphasize that self-regulatory capacity suffers influence not only from energy use but also from motivation, meaning, and belief systems (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Baumeister et al., 2024). Belief in God within religious settings has been found to be a protective factor boosting resilience, motivation, and psychological well-being (Metry et al., 2024; Nezlek, 2021; Upenieks & Ellison, 2022). McCullough and Willoughby (2009) argued that religious self-regulation differed from secular self-control because deeper meaning and perceived divine help supported the process. These results imply that ego depletion might have a distinct impact when self-regulation rests on moral integrity linked to divine values. Looking at ego depletion as a moderator provides a more detailed view of how and when moral integrity influences psychological well-being.

Previous studies have been observed to predominantly pay less attention to the exploration of the interactions between moral integrity, ego depletion, and psychological well-being, despite growing focus on morality and health. These investigations tend to focus either on the direct benefits of morality for wellness or the negative effects of ego depletion on self-regulation. Only a few explorations combined these perspectives to analyze the effects of ego depletion on the relationship between moral integrity and psychological well-being. This gap appears specifically noticeable in non-Western and religious communities, where moral values are closely associated with daily life and identity. Filling this void remains essential for developing a context-sensitive understanding of moral functioning and mental health.

The current study aims to explore how moral integrity affects psychological well-being, the impact of ego depletion on psychological health, and how ego depletion moderates the relationship between the two. It will include Muslim university students of Sundanese ethnicity, a demographic where moral and religious values greatly influence self-regulation and meaning-making. By combining moral integrity and ego depletion in one analytical framework, this study hopes to clarify when integrity can support or fail to support psychological well-being. The results are expected to add to the theoretical understanding of moral psychology and self-regulation studies while providing practical insights for promoting psychological well-being in religious and cultural settings.

Methods

Research Design

A quantitative correlational design formed the basis of this study, examining the relationships between moral integrity, ego depletion, and psychological well-being. The present study further investigated the moderating role of ego depletion in the connection between moral integrity and psychological health. The application of a moderation model allowed for testing whether the impact of integrity on well-being varied across distinct levels of self-regulatory fatigue. This design proved appropriate for identifying both main and interaction effects among variables without requiring experimental manipulation.

Participant

The study participants consisted of 247 Sundanese students, aged between 18 to 22 years, from a university in Bandung, Indonesia. Considering the fact that psychological well-being factors remain complex and influenced by cultural context (Wissing & Temane, 2008), this study selected subjects who were more homogeneous based on ethnicity, specifically focusing on Sundanese population prevalent in Bandung. Each participants were selected using purposive sampling and data collection was carried out using three distinct measurement instruments.

Instrument

Olson's Moral Integrity Survey (MIS) (2002) facilitated the measurement of Moral Integrity variable. Adaptation of MIS allowed for the evaluation of three dimensions: moral discernment, consistent behavior, and public justification. Assessment of psychological well-being variable utilized a rating scale derived from the Ryff and Keyes Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). A condensed version of the instrument gauged six dimensions, including self-acceptance, positive relations, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, and purpose in life. Salmon's Depletion Sensitivity Scale (Salmon et al., 2014) functioned to assess ego depletion variable. Cronbach's Alpha reliability tests showed coefficients of .859 for MIS, .920 for the Depletion Sensitivity Scale, and .785 for Psychological Well-Being Scale.

Data Analysis

Implementation of a General Linear Model (GLM) framework and moderation analysis facilitated the data examination. Descriptive statistics initially summarized participant characteristics and variable distributions. Classical assumption tests preceded hypothesis verification, comprising checks for normality of residuals (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk), homogeneity of residual variance (Breusch-Pagan test), and multicollinearity (variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance values). The

moderation analysis proceeded by designating moral integrity and ego depletion as independent variables, while psychological well-being served as the dependent outcome. Inclusion of an interaction term between moral integrity and ego depletion allowed for testing the moderating effect. Evaluation of model fit relied on R^2 and adjusted R^2 values, while partial eta squared (η^2p) represented effect sizes. Simple effects and simple slope analyses conducted at low (-1 SD), mean, and high ($+1$ SD) levels of ego depletion aided in interpreting the interaction pattern. Application of the Johnson-Neyman technique identified the specific range of ego depletion scores for which the effect of moral integrity on psychological well-being proved statistically significant. All inferential tests underwent adjustment for heteroscedasticity, with statistical significance set at the .05 level.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical principles of psychological investigations. Participants received information regarding the purpose of the inquiry, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of submitted responses. Collection of identifying details did not occur, ensuring all data underwent anonymous analysis.

Table 1

Assumption Testing Results

Assumption	Test	Statistic	p
Homoscedasticity	Breusch-Pagan	$\chi^2 = 2.68$.444
Normality	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	$D = 0.036$.914
	Shapiro-Wilk	$W = 0.991$.124
Multicollinearity	VIF Range	1.09 – 1.16	

Table 2

Model Fit Indices

R^2	Adjusted R^2	df	LRT χ^2	p
.553	.548	3	199	< .001

Results and Discussion

Results

Participants Characteristics

A total of 247 undergraduate students participated in the investigation. All participants identified as Muslim students from Sundanese ethnic group attending a university in Bandung, Indonesia and their ages ranged from 18 to 22 years. The sample remained fairly uniform regarding cultural and religious background. This homogeneity served to minimize the influence of external cultural variables on psychological well-being. Selection of this demographic mix aligns with the understanding that social and cultural factors influence psychological well-being (Wissing & Temane, 2008).

Assumption Testing

Several assumption tests performed prior to the moderation analysis ensured the appropriateness of the

Table 3

Omnibus ANOVA Tests

Predictor	SS	df	F	p	η^2p
Moral Integrity	3787.24	1	75.25	< .001	.264
Ego Depletion	6412.05	1	100.93	< .001	.377
Integrity \times Depletion	171.06	1	2.49	.116	.016

Table 4

Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Moral Integrity	.499	.057	.418	8.68	< .001
Ego Depletion	-.497	.049	-.559	-10.05	< .001
Integrity \times Depletion	.009	.006	.086	1.58	.116

Table 5

Simple Effects of Moral Integrity at Different Levels of Ego Depletion

Depletion Level	B	SE	β	t	p
Low (-1 SD)	.397	.077	.333	5.18	< .001
Mean	.499	.057	.418	8.68	< .001
High (+1 SD)	.601	.095	.504	6.30	< .001

statistical model. Application of Breusch–Pagan test examined the homogeneity of residual variance. The outcome proved non-significant, $\chi^2(3) = 2.68$, $p = .444$, suggesting the satisfaction of the homoscedasticity assumption. Assessment of residual normality utilized both Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests. The obtained results showed a normal distribution of residuals, with Kolmogorov–Smirnov $D = .036$, $p = .914$, and Shapiro–Wilk $W = .991$, $p = .124$ (Table 1). Multicollinearity diagnostics displayed acceptable figures, characterized by VIF scores below 3 and tolerance levels above .20 for all predictors. Based on these results, it was confirmed that the data adequately satisfied the requirements for moderation analysis.

Moderation Model Fit

GLM assessed the moderating role of ego depletion in the association between moral integrity and psychological well-being. The overall model showed a satisfactory fit and accounted for 55.3% of the variance in psychological well-being, $R^2 = .553$, adjusted $R^2 = .548$. The likelihood ratio test suggested statistical significance, $\chi^2(199) = 199$, $p < .001$ (Table 2).

Main and Interaction Effects

The omnibus ANOVA test showed significant main effects for moral integrity and ego depletion on psychological well-being. Moral integrity exerted a positive effect, $F(1, 243) = 75.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .264$, while ego depletion exerted a negative effect, $F(1, 243) = 100.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .377$. The interaction between moral integrity and ego depletion did not reach statistical significance in the standard GLM framework, $F(1, 243) = 2.49$, $p = .116$, $\eta^2p = .016$ (Table 3).

Parameter Estimates

Regression coefficients showed a positive association between moral integrity and psychological well-being ($B = .499$, $p < .001$), while ego depletion predicted psychological well-being in a negative direction ($B = -.497$, $p < .001$). The interaction term carried a small positive coefficient, yet statistical significance was not reached in the heteroscedasticity-adjusted GLM model (Table 4).

Simple Effects Analysis

Simple effects analysis reflected that moral integrity significantly predicted psychological well-being at all levels of ego depletion. At low levels of ego depletion (-1 SD), the effect of moral integrity was significant ($B = .397$, $p < .001$). At the mean level, the effect increased ($B = .499$, $p < .001$), and at high levels (+1 SD), it was observed to be the strongest ($B = .601$, $p < .001$) (Table 5).

Johnson–Neyman Analysis

Johnson–Neyman technique showed that the effect of moral integrity on psychological well-being reached statistical significance at ego depletion scores above 36 (raw score). Below this threshold, the moderating role of ego depletion failed to attain statistical significance. Johnson–Neyman Technique presented in Figure 1.

Simple Slope Visualization

A simple slope plot (Figure 2) was generated to show the interaction pattern. The graph reflected that moral integrity maintains a positive association with psychological well-being across all levels of ego depletion. However, steeper gradients at higher levels of depletion signified a magnified effect.

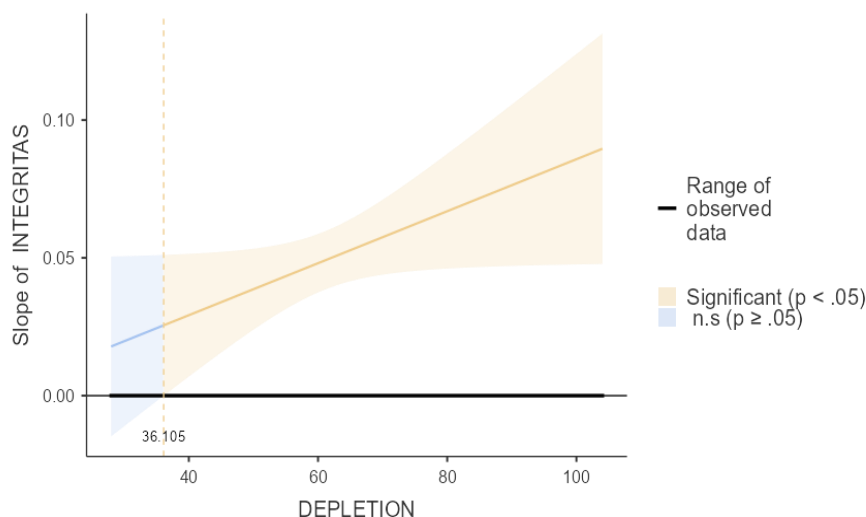


Figure 1. Johnson–Neyman Plot of Ego Depletion as a Moderator

Note. The shaded region indicates levels of ego depletion at which the effect of moral integrity on psychological well-being is statistically significant.

Discussion

Examination of the effects of moral integrity and ego depletion on psychological well-being, alongside the moderating role of ego depletion in this association, constituted the primary aim of this present study. Results show a clear positive predictive relationship between moral integrity and psychological health, while ego depletion functions as a negative predictor. Collectively, these outcomes affirm the combined influence of moral orientation and self-regulatory capacity on psychological functioning. Moderation analysis adds depth by clarifying how moral integrity operates under differing levels of self-regulatory fatigue, offering a more textured explanation of the observed dynamics. These outcomes support the proposed conceptual framework and remain aligned with the study objectives outlined in the introduction, reinforcing the coherence of the overall argument.

The positive association between moral integrity and psychological well-being aligns with earlier scholarship identifying integrity as a central character strength supporting psychological coherence and authenticity (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Schlenker (2008) similarly contends that behavior grounded in personal moral values promotes psychological stability and self-respect. In this present study, higher moral integrity corresponded with elevated psychological well-being across several dimensions, including purpose in life and positive relations with others, reinforcing Ryff and Keyes (1995) model emphasizing meaning, relational quality, and self-acceptance as pillars of health. Therefore, moral integrity appears to operate as an internal psychological resource nurturing these dimensions. From a self-determination theory

perspective, moral integrity reflects the internalization of moral values into the self-system, a process supporting autonomous motivation and psychological growth (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When moral conduct is experienced as self-endorsed rather than externally driven, psychological well-being becomes more attainable. Aquino and Reed (2002) further suggested that moral identity shapes psychological outcomes when morality occupies a central position within self-concept. The present results reinforce this view, as participants reporting stronger moral integrity exhibited higher levels of psychological health, suggesting well-being benefits arise most clearly when moral integrity forms part of an authentic self-narrative.

Despite the positive role of moral integrity, ego depletion surfaced as a significant negative predictor of psychological well-being. This result aligns with self-regulation theory, which posits that self-control relies on limited psychological resources (Baumeister, 2002; Baumeister et al., 2024). When these resources become depleted, individuals experience fatigue capable of undermining emotional regulation, motivation, and adaptive functioning. Previous studies have shown that ego depletion is associated with increased negative affect and reduced health (Tice et al., 2001; Xu et al., 2012). This present study extends the evidence by showing that ego depletion remains a critical factor even in contexts encompassing moral and religious self-regulation. Moderation analysis provides an important contribution by showing that ego depletion conditions the strength of the relationship between moral integrity and psychological well-being. Although the interaction term appeared small, further analyses using simple slopes and Johnson–Neyman

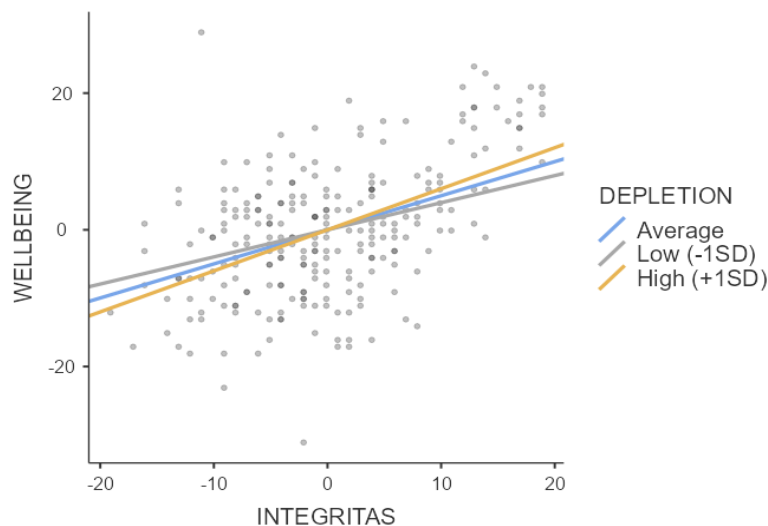


Figure 2. Simple Slope Plot of Moral Integrity Predicting Psychological Well-Being at Different Levels of Ego Depletion

technique reflected a meaningful moderating pattern. Specifically, moral integrity remained a significant predictor of psychological well-being at low, average, and high levels of ego depletion. However, the magnitude of the effect increased as ego depletion levels rose. This trend invariably shows that moral integrity becomes increasingly salient for psychological well-being when individuals experience higher self-regulatory demands.

Simple slope analysis demonstrated that at low levels of ego depletion, moral integrity held a positive but relatively weaker effect on psychological well-being. At average levels of ego depletion, the impact intensified, becoming strongest at high levels of fatigue. This pattern suggests that moral integrity may function as a compensatory psychological resource under conditions of self-regulatory strain. When individuals experience high ego depletion, maintaining alignment with moral values may provide a sense of meaning, control, and coherence that buffers against declines in well-being. This result complements the assertion by Baumeister and Vohs (2007) that motivation and meaning can influence how self-regulatory resources are utilized.

Johnson–Neyman analysis further clarified the conditional nature of the moderation effect. Results showed that the moderating role of ego depletion reached statistical significance at higher levels of fatigue, suggesting a threshold pattern. Below this limit, moral integrity maintained a relatively stable influence on psychological well-being across depletion states. Above the threshold, ego depletion meaningfully altered the strength of the association. This evidence underscores the value of probing moderation beyond conventional interaction terms

while capturing the fluid interplay between moral functioning and self-regulatory capacity.

Participant characteristics offer essential context for interpreting these outcomes. Participants consisted of Muslim university students of Sundanese ethnicity, a group in which moral and religious values remain deeply woven into daily life. McCullough and Willoughby (2009) argued that religious self-regulation often required continuous behavioral monitoring in line with moral and spiritual standards. Sustained moral vigilance of this kind may heighten vulnerability to ego depletion, specifically in demanding academic and social settings. On the flip side, moral integrity grounded in religious belief may supply psychological meaning capable of sustaining well-being under pressure.

Prior studies showed that belief in God and religious commitment supported resilience, meaning, and psychological well-being (Nezlek, 2021; Upenieks & Ellison, 2022). Metry et al. (2024) further proposed that religious belief mitigated stress by fostering transcendent meaning and perceived support. The present results are in line with such scholarship by showing that moral integrity, closely connected to religious values, continues to benefit psychological health even under elevated ego depletion. The outcomes further suggested that these benefits do not operate automatically but depend on individual capacity to manage self-regulatory demands. The presented distinction emphasizes the dual role of religion as a source of moral strength alongside a potential contributor to psychological strain.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results obtained from this study showed that moral integrity served as a significant positive predictor of psychological well-being, while

ego depletion reflected a significant negative effect. The results further reflected that individuals who consistently harmonized respective behaviors with moral values tend to experience higher levels of psychological well-being, particularly regarding meaning, self-acceptance, and positive relationships. However, sustained self-regulatory demands associated with moral behavior may also have increased vulnerability to ego depletion, a state capable of undermining psychological health. Considering these observations, it was inferred that moral integrity contributed to well-being in the broader context of individual self-regulatory capacity.

During the course of this investigation, an observation was made that ego depletion effectively conditioned the strength of the relationship between moral integrity and psychological well-being. Integrity remained beneficial across different levels of ego depletion, yet the influence became more pronounced under conditions of higher self-regulatory fatigue. This pattern suggested that moral integrity functioned as psychological resource helping individuals maintain well-being when self-control demands remained high. These conclusions emphasize the importance of integrating moral development with strategies to manage self-regulatory fatigue, particularly among Muslim university students holding moral and religious values central to daily life.

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Author Contributions

Conceptualization: [AAR]; Methodology: [AAR]; Data collection and investigation: [DN]; Data analysis: [DN]; Writing—Original Draft Preparation: [DN]; Writing—Review & Editing: [AAR]; Supervision: [AAR].

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors declare that no Artificial Intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies were used in the creation of this manuscript.

Ethical Clearance

This study adhered to ethical principles of psychological investigations. Participants received

information regarding the purpose of the inquiry, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of submitted responses. Collection of identifying details did not occur, ensuring all data underwent anonymous analysis.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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