

## Role of Birth Order in Personality Among Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

Personality is the characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that make a person. The birth order refers to the order in which the child is born in a family. The study focuses on the effects of birth order on personality. Birth order personality is not necessarily present in a child since their birth; instead, the family environment and the dynamics play a role in moulding a person's personality in the developmental stages of a child. The study was conducted to examine the effects of birth order on personality in young adults. For the study 150 individuals participated. The participants were aged between the range 18 to 25 years and were examined for type A/B personality. The data was analysed using ANOVA to come to the conclusion. The study concluded that birth order has no significant effect on personality in young adults.

**Keywords:** Birth Order, Personality, Young Adults

When psychologists define personality, they tend to refer to the qualities of a person, characteristics of a person's behavior or both. Psychologist Gordon Allport (1937) defined personality as "Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustments to his environment." But in a recent definition, psychologist Walter Mischel (1976) stated that "The distinctive patterns of behavior (including thoughts and emotions) that characterize each individual's adaptation to the situations of his or her life." (Morgan, 1993)

Over the years personality has been studied by several psychologists which has led to our current understanding of the subject and also led to the development of various theories to explain the origins and makeup of an individual's personality. Most of these theories can be categorized into four categories, i.e., Type and trait theory approach, which focuses on people's characteristics and how they are organized into systems; dynamic approach which emphasizes on-going interactions among motives, impulses, and psychological processes; learning and behavioral approaches which emphasizes the ways habits are acquired through basic conditioning or learning processes; and humanistic approaches which emphasize the self and the importance of the individual's subjective view of the world. (Morgan et al., 1993)

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Psychologist Alfred Adler used the dynamic approach to explain personality. Alfred Adler (1870-1937) was a renowned philosopher and a psychiatrist. He stressed upon the need to understand individuals in their social context. Adler came up with *individual psychology*. Unlike Freud and his understanding that whatever an individual does relates to their past or subconscious, Adler focused more or so on the future and wanted to understand what a human is striving for. Adler replaced the sex drive as a biological drive with masculine drive which was more psychological and subjective. (Müller, 2020) In his earliest and most famous publication “Study of Organ Inferiority and Its Physical Compensation” Adler outlined the concepts which led to the basis of his personality theory. The focus of the article was on organs or any portion of the body that might be weaker than the rest of the organs or parts. Adler postulated that the other stronger organs will start to compensate for the weaker or the inferior organ. Later Adler’s idea of inferior organs was replaced with the feelings of inferiority. Adler believed that people struggle with the feelings of inferiority and stated that it is basic human urge. This urge leads to the strive for superiority and when people work on that inferiority or emphasize on the inferiority it results in inferiority complex. (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 1998)

The second concept of Adler’s personality theory was that people tend to choose an approach towards how they live their life based on these inferiorities. This individualistic approach is a person’s way of understanding their own inferiorities and strategizing how they live to overcome those inferiorities and excel.

The third concept of his theory is where Adler gave attention to birth order and its role in personality development. His birth order theory described how family environment shapes a child’s thoughts and behavior and saw that children with different birth orders are treated differently in the family. (Adler in Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1956, p. 199). (Morgan et al., 1993)

Adler did not believe in the concept of personality types as he thought it led to the negation of the fact that each individual is unique. Instead of classifying individuals into personality types he recognised patterns that often formed during childhood. He held birth order responsible for formation of those patterns. (Study with GuruCools, 2021) By definition, birth order is the chronological order of sibling births in a family. Birth order has often been in debates among psychologists for its role in an individual’s personality development. It is researched and found that siblings, though living in the same family, experience different environments which may manifest itself and be expressed outside of the family setting and in the outside world. According to Adler first born are natural leaders, high achievers, organized, on-time, know it all, bossy, responsible, adult pleaser and obeys the rules. The middle born is more flexible, easy-going, social, peacemakers, independent, secretive, may feel life is unfair, strong negotiator and generous. The last born are risk takers, outgoing, creative, financially irresponsible, competitive, bored easily, likes to be pampered and sense of humor. Whereas the only children are more likely to be closer to parents, possess self-control, leader, mature, dependable, demanding, unforgiving, private and sensitive. (Dean, 2018)

Most of Adler’s ideas stemmed from his own personal experiences which also gave birth to the most famous concepts, i.e., Dethronement and Sibling Rivalry. Adler once said that though his mother, a caring and lovely lady loved all her children equally, when he was a child, he felt her focus shift from him to his newly born brother which didn’t sit well with him. This gave rise to his idea of both dethronement and sibling rivalry. The older sibling

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upon the arrival of younger sibling loses the prime focus of parents which they were earlier subjected to which leads to dethronement. And dethronement leads to a competition between the siblings for parental attention which is the sibling rivalry.

Adler was the first psychologist to incorporate birth order in personality development. He believed that each individual's personality gets affected by their place in the family or their perceived place in the family. The perceived position of an individual may or may not be their original chronological position in the family. Adler believed that each birth order has its own set of unique characteristics and personality traits which he studied.

Birth order personality are not necessarily present in a child since their birth instead the family environment and the dynamics play a role in molding a person's personality in the developmental stages of a child. Though every family is different and has different parenting styles, there can be a lot of similarities in the interactions parents have with their children, and sibling interaction and relationships.

Another psychologist who paid greater attention to the role of birth order in personality development was Frank J Sulloway, a renowned historian and Freud scholar. He strongly believed that an individual's birth order had effects on their big five personality traits and proposed his Family Niche Theory of Birth Order effects about which he wrote in his book "Born to Rebel: Birth Order, Family Dynamics and Creative Lives". Sulloway provided a grounded theory on the subject of conflicts in the parent or sibling relationship and came up with four causal mechanisms driving the differences in the sibling personality. The perception of equal and fair distribution of resources was the first of the four causal mechanisms. The second one, Sulloway called "dominance hierarchy effect" which stated that siblings adopt strategies to compete for the access of resources which was always influenced by the difference in size and strength of the sibling. Therefore, the older siblings who are already bigger and stronger than their younger siblings have an advantage over them. This results in a more dominant and assertive personality style.

Filling the role of the surrogate parent to the younger sibling is the third causal mechanism that Sulloway highlighted which is also called "niche partitioning". And "sibling deidentification" is the last causal mechanism. According to sibling deidentification age difference between the siblings is also a strong determinant of the strategies they choose. The lesser the age gap, the more there is a competition for the parentally determined resources increases. And so deidentification occurs which diversifies the strategies chosen and each one finds its own niche in the family giving way to niche partitioning and hence reducing the direct sibling competition. Siblings with larger age gap have different developmental needs than their siblings which leads to less competition for the same parentally determined resources and hence the niche partitioning occurs as a necessity rather than a strategy.

Sulloway saw the age gap between the siblings as the driving force for the birth order effects seen in the effects and so he emphasized more on the functional birth order rather than the ordinal birth order. Sulloway's differentiation model of birth order differences in personality suggests that the adoption of early developmental strategies to minimize conflict between siblings carry through to adult life in the form of stable and enduring personality traits.

In 1950, two cardiologists, Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenman developed "Type A and Type B personality hypothesis" which described two personality types. Personality was

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labelled as type A if the individual were competitive, highly organized, ambitious, impatient, highly aware of time management or aggressive whereas the more relaxed, laid back, less neurotic or frantic were labelled as Type B personality type. Friedman and Rosenman believed that Type A personality types were more likely to develop coronary heart diseases. This research had a significant effect on the field of health psychology.

The type A and type B personality categorization is based primarily on the reaction one has to stress. Type A and type B are used as extremes on which individuals are placed at. It is important to keep in mind that everyone can show any of the traits regardless of being type A or B from time to time to some degree or extent. But it is the tendency of how often they show these traits that label them as Type A or type.

Type A personality traits include competitiveness, time urgency and a tendency towards workaholicism. Type A personality can be seen as very achievement-oriented individuals who are hyper aware of the time and how much they can spare for work and situations. This can be related to the birth order theory since Adler believed that first born are natural leaders who are achievement oriented. Another similarity between Adler's theory of birth order and personality suggested that first born are organized. Organized behavior is also a key behavior pattern seen in Type A personality individuals.

On the other hand, Type B personality people are described as relaxed, easy going and highly flexible individuals. In rather simpler words it can be said that it is the opposite of the Type A personality. This doesn't mean that people with more of Type B personality traits are not achievers or are less interested in achieving things. Type B personality individuals have a very relaxed and easy approach towards achievement which results in lower stress levels in the individuals. This often gives them the benefit of showing flexibility and therefore can adapt well to situations.

### *Need for the Study*

In this study we study the effects of birth order has on personality using the Type A/B Behavioral Pattern scale. Understanding the effects of birth order on personality can enable us to understand an individual better and employ parenting styles that would provide constructive support to them in the early stages.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

R.L. Michalski and T.K. Shackelford (2002) in their study found very little evidence of birth order effecting individual personality. Michalski and Shackelford attempted to replicate Sulloway's study of the relationship between birth order and personality. In their research they found that Openness correlated positively with the first-born contradicting to what Sulloway hypothesized in his study. They conducted the study on two groups; participants with exclusively full genetic siblings and participants with half-siblings, Stepsiblings or adoptive siblings. Though the study predicted contrary to Sulloway on Openness but it did predict corroborating to Sulloway on Agreeableness. (Michalski & Shackelford, 2002)

Tshui Sun Ha and Cai Lian Tam (2011) conducted their study on birth order, academic performance and personality on Malaysian population. The results of the study showed that the participant's birth order did not affect individual's personality and academic performance. They found that both single born and firstborn scored highest in agreeableness and conscientiousness. But the difference wasn't significantly large and did not differ much in terms of extraversion, openness and emotional stability. (Ha & Tam, 2011)

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Eva Szobiova (2008) studied birth order, sibling constellation, creativity and personality dimension of adolescents. The personality traits of the birth orders were compared and it was concluded in the study that first born were more emotionally stable in comparison to only children. It also proved that birth order plays a very important role in affecting the creativity and personality characteristics, especially agreeableness and conscientiousness. (Szobiova, 2008)

Delroy L. Paulhus, Paul D. Trapnell and David Chen conducted a series of study to find the Birth order effects on personality and achievement within families with four different sample populations. They concluded that the first born were more achieving and conscientious whereas later born are more liberal, rebellious and agreeable. Their study supported the predictions made by Sulloway's niche model theory and Zajonc's confluence model of intelligence achievements. (Paulhus, Trapnell & Chen, 1999)

Curtis Gustafson (2010) in his study on the effects of birth order on personality which focused on a broad range of topics such as relationships, executive functioning and mental health. He found that adaptive perfectionism was higher in psychological first born and least common in psychological middleborns and younger birth ranks. First born also tend to become more stressful and anxious than later-born in stressful situations. Gustafson found that personality of individual is affected by their birth order. (Gustafson, 2010)

A study was conducted on a Pakistani population by Hina Sultan and Subha Malik on Adler Birth Order Predicts Personality Characteristics in Young Adult. The study was aimed at examining birth order as a predictor of resilience, forgiveness, locus of control (LOC), and deceptive communication. The study supported Adler's birth order theory through hierarchical regression analysis. It was revealed that first born were more resilient, and forgiving compared to middle born and last born. But the locus of control did not show any significant difference across the birth orders. (Sultan & Malik, 2020)

Tamanna Gupta, in her study on Birth Order and personality. The study was conducted on psychological dimensions of neuroticism, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness to assess the personality traits using questionnaire method. The study found that the first born are higher on neuroticism as compared to middle born and last born. The study concluded that the personality is shaped based on family influence, gender, location, early experiences, socio-economic factors, education and environmental exposures too rather than just birth order. (Gupta, 2017)

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Design***

A quantitative research method and a descriptive research design was chosen for this study. A descriptive research design can be used to investigate one or more variables. The variables in this research design are not manipulated or controlled but only observed.

### ***Statement of Problem***

To study the effects of birth order and personality among young adults.

### ***Research Question***

Does birth order play a role in the personality of an individual?

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### *Objective*

- To study the relationship between first born and type A personality in young adults.
- To study the relationship between middle born and Type A and type B personality in young adults.
- To study the relationship between last born and type B personality in young adults.
- To study the single born and the type A personality in young adults.

### *Hypothesis*

- There is a significant relationship between first born and type A personality.
- There is a significant relationship between middle born and type A and type B personality.
- There is a significant relationship between last born and type B personality.
- There is a significant relationship between single born and type A personality.

### *Variable(s)*

- Type A/B personality

### *Operational Definition*

#### **Type A personality**

- **Tenseness:** People with type A personality due to their high levels of impatience, restlessness and achievement orientation they tend to appear tense in their behaviors.
- **Impatience:** Time urgency impatience can be seen in individuals with type A personality. They get frustrated when waiting for longer period than expected, interrupt others often, walk and talk rapidly etc. These individuals are extremely aware of the time and how little they have to spare.
- **Restlessness:** The individuals with type A personality mostly tend to be restlessness and have a need to move constantly and be involved in things which can keep them occupied.
- **Achievement Orientation:** Type A individuals are highly achievement oriented, i.e., they get a feeling of worthiness upon achieving and how much they achieve. They have a lot of competitive streaks in them.
- **Domineering:** Individuals with type A personality show dominance in most of the aspects of life, either personal or professional.
- **Workaholic:** With their achievement orientation, individuals with type A personality mostly tend to work or sometimes overwork themselves to achieve more than anyone else they know.

#### **Type B personality**

- **Complacent:** They have an uncritical satisfaction with self and their achievements.
- **Easy Going:** Type B personality individuals adapt well to situations. They try everything to get an experience or to please others.
- **Non-Assertiveness:** People with type B personality trait also show non assertiveness and are very flexible. They can adapt and go with things that sit in accordance with the situation.
- **Relaxed:** People with type B personality have a relaxed attitude and are even tempered. This personality trait allows people to feel comfortable in their presence.

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- **Patience:** Individuals with type B personality, in contrast to type A personality show a lot of patience. They do not show annoyance or anxious, signs of impatience, in situations which requires time.

### *Demographic variable*

In this study participants between the age range 18 to 25 years were only selected.

### *Universe of the Study*

Young adults in India.

- **Geographical Area:** Urban parts of India.
- **Sample Distribution:** Age range between 18 to 25 years
- **Sample Technique:** Snowball Sampling

**Inclusion criteria:** The individuals must fall between the ages of 18 to 25 years of age to participate in the study.

**Exclusion criteria:** Individuals beyond the age of 25 years were excluded from the study. Individuals having chronic illnesses or mental disorders were also excluded from this study.

### *Procedure*

The Type A/B behavioural pattern scale was administered to the participants and they were asked to read the questions on the questionnaire and answer accordingly. The answers ranged from Strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree and strongly disagree. The questionnaire also collected data regarding their birth order and age.

After the data was collected it was scored according to the answers of the participants. 'Strongly agree' getting a score of 5, 'agree' a score of 4, 'uncertain' a score of 3, 'disagree' a score of 2 and 'strongly disagree' a score of 1.

The data was then tabulated using Microsoft excel, analysed using ANOVA and then interpreted.

### *Research Ethics Followed*

The researcher debriefed the participants about the purpose of the study without creating a bias in the responses.

The instructions were given and explained to the participants about the information that is to be provided in the form. They were briefed that this was just a means to collect information and it wasn't a test. Hence, no answer to the questions asked had any right or wrong answers.

Participation was absolutely voluntary. They were informed that they can leave the study at any point if they felt they no longer consented to the participation in this research.

The participants were notified that the details, information and results will be used only for research purpose and were kept truly confidential.

### *Tools for the Study*

Type A/B Behavioral Pattern Scale

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### Description of Tool

Type A/B Behavioral Pattern Scale is used for the data collection for this study. Test ABBPS was introduced by Mr. Upinder Dhar, Director of Prestige Institute of Management and Research to Education and Health Sector and Manisha Jain, Counsellor at ANKUR psychological Agency.

In the test one tries to identify the behavioural pattern of the participant either as type A or type B, on the basis of score on the both part test i.e., part I & part II.

In Part I there are 17 questions having six factors (i.e., Tenseness, impatience, restlessness, achievement orientation, domineering and workaholic) and in part II there are 16 questions having five factors (i.e., complacent, easy-going, non-assertiveness, relaxed and patience).

### Analysis

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical test is used for the analysis of the data in the study. The differences based on the birth-order were tested by the one-way ANOVA method. It is method of testing the hypothesis procedure for studies with three or more groups.

The groups were studied for the inclination shown towards either type A personality traits and type B personality traits by birth orders, i.e., first born, middle born, last born and single born. Analysis for type A and type B is done separately, and the significance threshold or the  $p$  value was set to 0.05.

## RESULT

*Table 6.1 Mean and P value for type A/B personality type in all the birth orders*

	Birth Order	Mean	P value
Type A	F	53.927	0.53
	M	52.071	
	L	53.687	
	S	51.210	
Type B	F	54.275	0.83
	M	54.142	
	L	55.270	
	S	54.578	

*Table 6.2 Mean and p value for type A personality factors in all the birth orders.*

	Birth order	Mean	P value
TENSENESS	F	13.144	0.81
	M	13.5	
	L	13.104	
	S	12.631	
IMPATIENCENESS	F	6.695	0.40
	M	5.857	
	L	6.354	
	S	6.736	
RESTLESSNESS	F	9.333	0.91
	M	9.142	



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	L	9.083	
	S	9.421	
<b>ACHIEVEMENT ORIENTATION</b>	F	10.043	0.10
	M	8.857	
	L	10.312	
	S	9.315	
<b>DOMINEERING</b>	F	9.376	0.14
	M	9.357	
	L	9.0833	
	S	8.552	
<b>WORKAHOLIC</b>	F	5.333	0.44
	M	5.357	
	L	5.75	
	S	5.05	

*Table 6.3 Mean and p value for type B personality factor of all the birth orders*

	Birth order	Mean	P value
<b>COMPLACENT</b>	F	12.840	0.99
	M	12.785	
	L	12.833	
	S	12.736	
<b>EASY GOING</b>	F	14.972	0.77
	M	14.714	
	L	15.270	
	S	14.789	
<b>NON-ASSERTIVE</b>	F	7.086	0.67
	M	7.285	
	L	7.395	
	S	7.315	
<b>RELAXED</b>	F	9.391	0.57
	M	10.0	
	L	9.791	
	S	9.842	
<b>PATIENCE</b>	F	14.971	0.77
	M	14.714	
	L	15.270	
	S	14.789	

**Note:** F = First born  
M = Middle born

L = Last born  
S = Single born

## **DISCUSSION**

The aim of the study is to find a relation between birth order and personality traits. Total of 150 individuals participated in the study using a snowball technique of sample collection between the age group of 18 to 25 years. There were 69 first-borns, 14 middle born, 48 last born and 19 single born participants. The participants were administered a self-report questionnaire, i.e., the Type A/B Behavioural Patterns scale or ABBPS and the data collected was analysed using ANOVA.

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For type A behavioural patterns across the birth order the mean calculated was 53.927 for first born, 52.071 for middle born, 53.687 for last born and 51.210 for single born. The variance calculated for Firstborn, middle born, last born and single born was 76.303, 23.917, 64.347 and 36.397 respectively. The p value for type A personality was calculated to be 0.53. The threshold of significance assigned was 0.05. Therefore,  $p > 0.05$ . Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted in this case.

For type B behavioural patterns, the mean scores calculated for the birth orders were 54.275 for first born, 54.142 for middle born, 55.270 for last born and 54.578 for single born. The variance calculated were 47.555, 27.054, 26.371 and 36.590 for first born, middle born, last born and single born respectively. The p value for type B personality was calculated as 0.83. The threshold significance assigned was 0.05. Therefore  $p > 0.05$ . Hence, null hypothesis was accepted in this case too.

When the factors were studied separately to look for a trait that might be dominant in any birth order, the results concluded to null hypothesis, i.e., no difference was found in any of the factors. In type A personality factors among the birth orders (table 2) the  $p = 0.81$  for tenseness,  $p = 0.40$  for impatience,  $p = 0.91$  for restlessness,  $p = 0.10$  for achievement orientation,  $p = 0.14$  for domineering and  $p = 0.44$  for workaholic. In all the cases,  $p > 0.05$ , indicating small to no significant difference between the data. In type B personality factors (table 3),  $p = 0.99$  for complacent,  $p = 0.77$  for easy-going,  $p = 0.67$  for non-assertive,  $p = 0.57$  for relaxed and  $p = 0.76$  for patience. In all the cases in type B personality factors too,  $p > 0.05$ , indicating small to no significant difference in the data.

These results indicated no significant findings in the data that can be used to prove the hypotheses which can show a difference in personality types or even traits between the individuals of different birth orders.

## CONCLUSION

As we can see from the research explored in this paper, birth order does not have any effect on personality. The birth orders were checked for inclination towards type A or type B personality. The results did not show any specific inclination towards either by any of the birth orders. Each factor of each personality was also assessed to see if any effect was seen or not. This research proved a null hypothesis, hence rejecting the hypothesis that states that 'There is a significant relationship between first born and Type A personality', 'There is a significant relationship between Middle born and type A and Type B personality', 'There is a significant relationship between last born and Type B personality' and 'There is a significant relationship between Single born and type A personality'.

### *Research Gaps*

There are certain limitations in this study which can also pave way for further research. The size of the participant population was only limited to 150 individuals, which is a very limited study population. The age range for this study was chosen as 18 to 25 years which is a limitation in itself, since according to Sulloway (2010), birth order differences in personality can be seen clearly in childhood and adolescence.

Our analysis on the type A/B personality did not include adopted individuals, people from the LGBTQ+ community and rural parts of the country. The population was severely narrowed down to only urban parts of the country with male and female individuals. The

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data could be more inclusive for a diversity in the data set to check for the effects in a larger section of society.

There could be several other elements that can shape an individual's personality like the number of siblings, economic and financial background, community, parenting styles, etcetera, which were not considered in this study. Though the study did not find any relationship between birth order and personality, it cannot negate the theories that claim that birth order effects also emerge under different societal conditions.

Another limitation of this study is that it did not check for within the family sibling for data. There may be a possibility that these birth order personality effects might be situational or conditional and can be seen when tested along with their siblings. The age gap between siblings also plays a role in personality development which was not considered in this study. Educational background of the individual and the family is also involved in the shaping of personality which was not noted in this study. These subjective information about an individual shapes the personality of an individual as caregivers adopt different strategies to bring up children. A lot of time first time parents work on trial-and-error method with parenting styles to see which suits them the most and works for their first born and then in later born may not use the failed strategies and just go with what worked for the first born. These factors too interplay to form the individual's personality.

These research gaps can always be used to bridge the lack of information and may or may not find the relationship between birth order and personality but with a clearer dataset.

### **Implications**

This study and its findings can be used for future research on similar topics. As in this study personality factors such as tenseness, impatience, restlessness, achievement orientation, domineering, workaholic, complacent, easy going, non-assertiveness relaxed and patience, researchers can look for personality traits that may be different from these or may include populations that may have been missed in this research. Disconfirmation of these hypotheses is interesting and needs further inquiry before coming to a firm conclusion.

Other implication of this study is that the findings can also be used by parents in their parenting style. Since this study found no significant difference between the birth orders for the factors of personality tested, parents can adopt parenting of the siblings in ways that will help develop personalities that help them thrive in future and provide appropriate care and support to them.

This research may also help bridge the research gap formed during previous studies. It may provide information that may have been missed and a perspective that would have been missing from the previous researches like age groups, population demography, etc. This research can also be used as a basis of further investigation into the topic.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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