

## Systematic Review of the Relationship Between Cultural Religiosity, Emotion Regulation, and Rumination Within the Framework of Educational Psychology

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this systematic review was to examine the relationship between cultural religiosity, emotion regulation, and rumination within the framework of educational psychology. Given the significant role of emotional and cognitive processes in individual development and education, understanding how components of religiosity within the Iranian cultural context influence these constructs is of particular importance. A systematic search was conducted in both national and international databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, PubMed, Noormags, SID, and Magiran, using relevant keywords. Studies published between 2000 and 2025 that examined the relationship between religiosity, emotion regulation, and rumination were included in the review. The findings indicated that cultural religiosity is generally associated with increased use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies and reduced rumination. Components such as meaning-making, religion-based social support, a sense of connection to a transcendent source, and acceptance were identified as important mechanisms through which religiosity influences emotion regulation. The results also demonstrated that religiosity, through strengthening positive emotion-focused strategies, may reduce maladaptive cognitive processes such as rumination. Nevertheless, several studies emphasized the dual role of religiosity and showed that unhealthy or compulsive forms of religiosity may be associated with increased anxiety and repetitive thoughts. Overall, the evidence from the present review suggests that cultural religiosity, within the socio-cultural context of Iran, can function as a protective factor against negative emotions and rumination and, through improving emotion regulation, may contribute to the enhancement of educational processes and psychological development.

**Keywords:** cultural religiosity, emotion regulation, rumination, mental health, systematic review, educational psychology

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### Introduction

Mental health and psychological well-being have become major concerns in contemporary societies due to the increasing prevalence of emotional disorders, chronic stress, anxiety-related conditions, and maladaptive cognitive patterns among adolescents and adults. In recent decades, psychological researchers have increasingly emphasized the role of emotional and cognitive processes in the development, maintenance, and treatment of psychological disorders. Among these processes, emotion regulation and

rumination have attracted substantial attention because of their close association with anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, psychological distress, and impaired social functioning (1, 2). Emotion regulation refers to the processes through which individuals monitor, evaluate, and modify emotional experiences and emotional expression in order to achieve adaptive functioning (1). Rumination, in contrast, is generally conceptualized as a repetitive and passive focus on negative emotions, distress, and the possible causes and consequences of problems, which often intensifies psychological vulnerability and emotional dysregulation (3, 4).

Research findings indicate that maladaptive emotion regulation strategies and persistent rumination are strongly associated with psychological disorders, including depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and social anxiety symptoms (5-7). Emotional dysregulation has also been identified as one of the central mechanisms underlying chronic psychological distress and impaired interpersonal functioning (8, 9). Studies have demonstrated that individuals with poor emotion regulation skills are more likely to experience repetitive negative thinking, emotional instability, heightened stress responses, and reduced resilience in confronting life challenges (10, 11). Rumination, particularly when prolonged and repetitive, can impair cognitive flexibility, increase anxiety sensitivity, and contribute to the persistence of negative affective states (12, 13).

The educational and developmental consequences of these emotional and cognitive difficulties are also significant. Students who experience elevated levels of rumination and emotional dysregulation frequently show reduced academic motivation, impaired concentration, interpersonal difficulties, and decreased psychological well-being (14, 15). Furthermore, maladaptive emotional processing may undermine self-esteem, resilience, and emotional security, thereby affecting developmental trajectories during adolescence and early adulthood (16, 17). Consequently, identifying protective psychological and cultural factors capable of improving emotional functioning and reducing rumination has become an important focus in health and educational psychology.

One of the most influential protective factors discussed in recent psychological literature is religiosity and spirituality. Religiosity is generally understood as a multidimensional construct involving beliefs, practices, values, rituals, and emotional experiences associated with the sacred or transcendent (18). Within many societies, religiosity is deeply intertwined with cultural identity, social norms, and collective meaning systems. In the Iranian socio-cultural context, cultural religiosity plays a central role in shaping interpersonal relationships, emotional experiences, coping styles, and perceptions of security and meaning (19, 20). Cultural religiosity extends beyond individual spiritual beliefs and encompasses socially shared religious practices, cultural traditions, and collective interpretations of moral and emotional experiences.

Several theoretical perspectives suggest that religiosity may influence psychological adjustment through multiple cognitive and emotional pathways. Religiosity may provide individuals with existential meaning, emotional comfort, social support, and adaptive coping resources during stressful experiences (18). Religious beliefs and practices can foster acceptance, patience, forgiveness, hope, and emotional self-regulation, thereby reducing emotional distress and maladaptive cognitive processes. Moreover, religious participation may strengthen feelings of social belonging, psychological security, and emotional connectedness within communities (21, 22). Such mechanisms are particularly relevant in collectivist and culturally religious

societies where social identity and emotional functioning are closely linked to shared religious values and practices.

Empirical studies have increasingly supported the relationship between religiosity and psychological adjustment. Research has shown that positive religious orientation is associated with greater psychological well-being, emotional stability, resilience, and adaptive coping strategies (23). In culturally religious environments, religiosity may also reduce emotional loneliness and existential anxiety by promoting a sense of meaning and transcendence. Furthermore, religious coping strategies have been linked to reduced levels of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms in both clinical and non-clinical populations (24). Spiritual intelligence and mindfulness-based awareness, which are often associated with religious and spiritual practices, may also enhance distress tolerance and emotional flexibility (24, 25).

Mindfulness and acceptance-based approaches have become especially important within contemporary psychological interventions targeting emotion regulation and rumination. These approaches emphasize present-moment awareness, acceptance of internal experiences, and reduction of cognitive fusion and experiential avoidance (2, 25). Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions in improving emotional regulation, reducing rumination, and enhancing resilience among diverse populations (4, 26, 27). Mindfulness-based therapies have also shown positive effects in reducing obsessive-compulsive symptoms, anxiety, and emotional distress (28, 29). These findings suggest that cognitive and emotional processes can be significantly modified through interventions emphasizing awareness, acceptance, and adaptive self-regulation.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), another influential third-wave therapeutic approach, has similarly demonstrated effectiveness in reducing rumination, depression, anxiety sensitivity, and emotional dysregulation (30, 31). ACT interventions focus on psychological flexibility, acceptance of difficult emotions, and commitment to meaningful values. Studies have shown that ACT-based interventions can improve emotional safety, tolerance of uncertainty, and adaptive cognitive processing (32). These therapeutic frameworks share conceptual similarities with certain dimensions of religiosity and spirituality, particularly regarding acceptance, meaning-making, and transcendence.

The relationship between rumination and anxiety-related disorders has also received extensive empirical support. Rumination has been identified as a significant predictor of obsessive-compulsive symptoms, social anxiety, generalized anxiety disorder, and depressive symptomatology (7, 33). Cognitive fusion and experiential avoidance have been proposed as key mediating mechanisms linking rumination with emotional distress and social anxiety symptoms (6, 12). Similarly, distress tolerance has emerged as an important factor in reducing repetitive negative thinking and emotional vulnerability (13, 34). These findings collectively indicate that maladaptive cognitive-emotional patterns can significantly impair psychological functioning and quality of life.

The consequences of persistent emotional dysregulation and rumination extend beyond psychological discomfort and may influence physical health, academic performance, and social functioning. Chronic rumination has been associated with increased suicide risk, reduced quality of life, chronic headaches, and psychosomatic symptoms (35). Obsessive-compulsive symptoms and anxiety disorders have also been linked to substantial functional impairment and elevated mortality risk (36). Therefore, identifying culturally

meaningful and psychologically effective protective factors capable of reducing emotional vulnerability remains a critical objective within contemporary mental health research.

Within the Iranian cultural context, religiosity may function as one such protective factor because religious beliefs and practices are closely integrated into social life, family relationships, and cultural identity formation (19). Family social capital, religious participation, and collective cultural values can influence adolescents' emotional development, sense of security, and psychological adjustment (20, 21). Religious identity may also contribute to resilience by providing individuals with coherent moral frameworks and supportive social networks. Nevertheless, some scholars have suggested that rigid or fear-based forms of religiosity may occasionally contribute to guilt, anxiety, or obsessive cognitive tendencies if accompanied by excessive self-monitoring or emotional suppression (23). Consequently, the relationship between religiosity and emotional functioning may be multidimensional and context-dependent.

Despite the growing body of literature on emotion regulation, rumination, mindfulness, and religiosity, relatively few studies have systematically integrated these variables within a comprehensive cultural and educational psychology framework. Existing research has often examined these constructs separately or within limited clinical populations. Moreover, the specific role of cultural religiosity in influencing emotional regulation and repetitive negative thinking in the Iranian socio-cultural context has not yet been sufficiently synthesized through systematic review methods. Considering the increasing prevalence of emotional disorders and cognitive-emotional difficulties among adolescents and university students, understanding culturally relevant protective factors may provide valuable implications for psychological interventions, educational programs, and preventive mental health strategies (37, 38).

In addition, recent developments in health psychology and educational psychology emphasize the importance of integrating cultural, spiritual, emotional, and cognitive dimensions in understanding mental health and human development (39). Theoretical and empirical evidence increasingly supports the notion that emotional regulation capacities are shaped not only by individual psychological traits but also by broader cultural and spiritual systems that provide meaning, social support, and coping resources. Consequently, examining the relationship between cultural religiosity, emotion regulation, and rumination may contribute to a deeper understanding of protective psychological mechanisms within culturally religious societies.

Accordingly, the present study aimed to systematically review the relationship between cultural religiosity, emotion regulation, and rumination within the framework of health and educational psychology.

## **Methods and Materials**

The aim of the present study was to conduct a library-based and systematic review to examine the relationship between cultural religiosity, emotion regulation, and rumination within the field of health psychology. This review was conducted with the purpose of collecting, classifying, and synthesizing the findings of previous studies.

To collect the data, a comprehensive search was conducted in reputable national and international databases, including Noormags, SID, Magiran, Google Scholar, Scopus, and PubMed. The primary keywords included "cultural religiosity," "emotion regulation," "rumination," "health psychology," and their Persian equivalents, which were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR).

The time frame of the reviewed articles was determined to be between 2000 and 2025 in order to include the most recent findings. The inclusion criteria consisted of scientific research articles (Persian and English) that examined the direct or indirect relationship among the main variables. Review articles, purely qualitative studies, and reports lacking empirical data were excluded from the study. After removing duplicate records and conducting the initial screening based on titles and abstracts, the remaining articles were evaluated in full text. Ultimately, 43 relevant articles with appropriate methodological quality were selected for analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive and integrative approach in order to identify and summarize the existing patterns and trends within the research literature.

## Findings and Results

The findings of the present systematic review demonstrated that cultural religiosity was consistently associated with more adaptive patterns of emotion regulation and lower levels of rumination across most of the reviewed studies. From the initial pool of retrieved studies, 43 articles met the inclusion criteria and were analyzed. The reviewed studies included correlational, comparative, and structural equation modeling designs conducted across adolescent, student, clinical, and community populations. Most studies reported a significant positive relationship between cultural religiosity and adaptive emotion regulation strategies such as cognitive reappraisal, acceptance, emotional self-control, and meaning-focused coping. In contrast, a significant negative association was frequently observed between religiosity and maladaptive emotional processes, including emotional suppression, repetitive negative thinking, and rumination.

Table 1 presents the general characteristics of the reviewed studies, including publication period, research design, sample type, and primary findings related to the variables under investigation.

**Table 1. Source Characteristics**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Publication Period	2000–2009	7	16.28
	2010–2019	18	41.86
	2020–2025	18	41.86
Research Design	Correlational	24	55.81
	Structural Equation Modeling	8	18.60
	Comparative/Causal-Comparative	6	13.95
	Experimental/Interventional	5	11.63
Population Type	University Students	17	39.53
	Adolescents	11	25.58
	Clinical Populations	8	18.60
	General Population	7	16.28
Main Outcome	Positive association between religiosity and adaptive emotion regulation	35	81.40
	Negative association between religiosity and rumination	31	72.09
	Mixed or dual effects of religiosity	9	20.93

As shown in Table 1, the majority of the reviewed studies were published between 2010 and 2025, indicating increasing scholarly attention to the role of religiosity in psychological functioning during recent decades. Correlational studies represented the most common methodological approach (55.81%). University students and adolescents constituted the most frequently studied populations. Furthermore, more than 80% of the reviewed studies reported a positive association between cultural religiosity and adaptive emotion

regulation strategies, whereas approximately 72% identified an inverse relationship between religiosity and rumination.

The synthesis of findings also indicated that specific dimensions of religiosity played different roles in emotional and cognitive functioning. Intrinsic religiosity, spiritual meaning-making, trust in God, and participation in collective religious practices were among the most consistently protective factors. In contrast, rigid, guilt-oriented, or compulsive forms of religiosity were occasionally associated with heightened anxiety, cognitive rigidity, and repetitive negative thoughts. Several studies further demonstrated that adaptive emotion regulation mediated the relationship between religiosity and reduced rumination.

Table 2 summarizes the major psychological mechanisms identified in the reviewed literature regarding the relationship between cultural religiosity, emotion regulation, and rumination.

**Table 2. Summary of Findings**

Psychological Mechanism	Observed Effect	Frequency of Reporting
Meaning-making and existential coherence	Improved emotional stability and reduced distress	29
Religion-based social support	Increased emotional coping capacity	24
Cognitive reappraisal	Reduction in negative affect and rumination	27
Acceptance and spiritual surrender	Lower emotional suppression and anxiety	22
Religious rituals and practices	Enhanced emotional self-regulation	20
Intrinsic religiosity	Increased psychological resilience	26
Compulsive or fear-based religiosity	Increased repetitive thoughts and anxiety	11
Positive emotion-focused coping	Decreased rumination and cognitive preoccupation	25

As indicated in Table 2, meaning-making and cognitive reappraisal were among the most frequently reported mechanisms linking religiosity to psychological adjustment. Studies consistently showed that individuals with higher levels of intrinsic and culturally integrated religiosity demonstrated greater emotional resilience, improved coping capacity, and lower levels of rumination. Moreover, positive religious coping strategies appeared to facilitate adaptive cognitive processing and emotional acceptance. Nevertheless, a smaller group of studies highlighted that fear-based or compulsive religiosity could contribute to maladaptive emotional outcomes, particularly when accompanied by excessive guilt, rigid beliefs, or chronic self-monitoring.

Overall, the reviewed evidence suggests that cultural religiosity may function as a protective psychological resource within the Iranian socio-cultural context by strengthening adaptive emotion regulation processes and reducing maladaptive cognitive patterns such as rumination.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present systematic review demonstrated that cultural religiosity was generally associated with improved emotion regulation and lower levels of rumination across the majority of reviewed studies. The synthesis of findings further indicated that religious meaning-making, spiritual connectedness, religion-based social support, and acceptance-oriented coping mechanisms were among the most important pathways through which religiosity contributed to emotional adjustment. These findings are consistent with theoretical perspectives emphasizing that religiosity functions as a multidimensional psychological resource capable of facilitating adaptive emotional processing and reducing cognitive vulnerability (18, 23). In culturally religious societies, religiosity often provides individuals with coherent systems of meaning and

emotional support that can reduce psychological confusion and emotional instability during stressful situations.

One of the major findings of the review was the significant relationship between religiosity and adaptive emotion regulation strategies. This result aligns with Gross's process model of emotion regulation, which emphasizes the importance of adaptive cognitive and behavioral mechanisms in emotional adjustment (1). Individuals with stronger religious and spiritual orientations may develop greater emotional awareness, patience, acceptance, and self-control, thereby improving their ability to regulate negative emotions effectively. Religious practices such as prayer, meditation, reflection, and collective participation may also increase emotional stability and reduce impulsive reactions to distressing experiences. Similar findings have been reported in studies showing that mindfulness and spiritually oriented interventions improve emotional resilience and emotional self-regulation (24, 25).

The review findings also showed that religiosity was negatively associated with rumination and repetitive negative thinking. Rumination has consistently been identified as a maladaptive cognitive process that intensifies anxiety, depression, and emotional distress (3, 5). Individuals who repeatedly focus on negative experiences and perceived failures often experience cognitive rigidity and emotional exhaustion. The present findings suggest that cultural religiosity may weaken these maladaptive cognitive cycles by encouraging acceptance, trust, hope, and meaning-focused coping. Religious beliefs may help individuals reinterpret stressful experiences within broader existential frameworks, thereby reducing excessive cognitive preoccupation and self-focused negative thinking. This interpretation is supported by studies indicating that adaptive cognitive restructuring and meaning-oriented coping reduce the intensity of rumination and psychological distress (10, 11).

Another important finding was that religiosity appeared to strengthen positive emotion-focused coping strategies. This result is consistent with studies demonstrating that spirituality and mindfulness-based awareness enhance psychological flexibility and reduce experiential avoidance (2, 6). Religious and spiritual practices may encourage individuals to tolerate difficult emotions rather than avoid or suppress them. In this context, religiosity may indirectly reduce rumination through improving distress tolerance and emotional acceptance. This finding is also consistent with studies showing that distress tolerance functions as a protective factor against obsessive thinking and emotional dysregulation (13, 34). Individuals with stronger religious coping mechanisms may therefore experience greater emotional resilience during stressful life events.

The findings regarding the role of mindfulness-related mechanisms were particularly notable. Several reviewed studies suggested that mindfulness-based awareness and acceptance-oriented interventions substantially reduce rumination and emotional dysregulation (4, 28). Mindfulness-based therapeutic approaches encourage individuals to observe internal experiences without judgment, thereby reducing cognitive fusion and repetitive negative thought patterns. Because many religious traditions also emphasize contemplation, awareness, patience, and emotional acceptance, there may be conceptual overlap between mindfulness-related processes and culturally integrated religiosity. Studies on mindfulness interventions among patients with obsessive-compulsive symptoms, chronic illness, and emotional disorders similarly reported improvements in resilience and reductions in rumination (26, 27, 29). These findings support the

argument that both religiosity and mindfulness may promote adaptive emotional functioning through related cognitive-emotional mechanisms.

The present findings additionally support research indicating that emotional dysregulation and rumination are central mechanisms underlying social anxiety and obsessive-compulsive symptoms (12, 33). Rumination often amplifies self-focused attention, anxiety sensitivity, and cognitive fusion, thereby increasing emotional distress and maladaptive behavioral patterns. The reviewed evidence suggests that religiosity may weaken these processes by fostering psychological security, social connectedness, and emotional meaning. In Iranian culture, religious participation is often closely associated with family support, collective identity, and social cohesion, which may reduce feelings of isolation and emotional insecurity (19, 20). Such social and cultural mechanisms likely strengthen emotional adjustment and decrease vulnerability to repetitive negative thinking.

The findings related to social support and emotional security are also consistent with previous literature emphasizing the importance of interpersonal connectedness in psychological health. Religious communities frequently provide emotional validation, moral guidance, and collective support during stressful situations. This communal aspect of religiosity may enhance emotional safety and resilience, particularly among adolescents and vulnerable populations. Previous studies have shown that emotional safety significantly predicts reduced bullying-related behaviors and greater psychological adjustment (16, 17). Similarly, a stronger sense of security and social identity has been associated with improved emotional functioning and reduced anxiety (21). Therefore, religiosity may contribute to mental health not only through internal cognitive mechanisms but also through broader social and relational processes.

The findings concerning acceptance-based interventions also provide important interpretive insights. Studies on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy demonstrated significant reductions in depression symptoms, rumination, uncertainty intolerance, and emotional distress (30, 31). Acceptance-oriented approaches encourage individuals to disengage from rigid cognitive control and repetitive negative evaluation. Many religious and spiritual traditions similarly encourage surrender, trust, patience, and acceptance of uncertainty, which may reduce maladaptive cognitive struggle and emotional resistance. The effectiveness of ACT-based interventions in improving emotional safety and psychological flexibility further supports the interpretation that adaptive acceptance processes may mediate the relationship between religiosity and emotional adjustment (32).

The review also highlighted the significant relationship between rumination and obsessive-compulsive symptomatology. Studies have shown that repetitive negative thinking and emotional dysregulation contribute to the persistence of obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors (7, 8). The present findings suggest that adaptive religiosity may reduce obsessive cognitive patterns by strengthening emotional regulation capacities and reducing experiential avoidance. However, the review also identified evidence indicating that unhealthy or compulsive forms of religiosity may contribute to anxiety, excessive guilt, and obsessive thinking in certain individuals. This finding supports previous theoretical perspectives emphasizing that the psychological effects of religiosity depend on the quality and orientation of religious beliefs rather than religiosity alone (23). Fear-based or rigid religious interpretations may intensify self-monitoring and emotional suppression, thereby increasing psychological distress.

Another important implication of the findings concerns the educational and developmental significance of emotional regulation and rumination. Emotional dysregulation has been associated with reduced academic functioning, impaired concentration, and lower psychological well-being among university students and adolescents (14). The reviewed evidence suggests that cultural religiosity may support educational adjustment by promoting emotional balance, psychological resilience, and adaptive coping. Students who possess stronger emotional regulation capacities are more likely to experience motivation, emotional stability, and positive interpersonal relationships (10). Therefore, culturally integrated psychological approaches that acknowledge the role of spirituality and religiosity may contribute to healthier educational environments and improved developmental outcomes.

The present review additionally contributes to the growing literature emphasizing the integration of cultural and psychological perspectives in mental health research. Emotional experiences and coping mechanisms are deeply shaped by cultural contexts, social values, and belief systems. In the Iranian cultural context, religiosity is closely linked to social identity, collective norms, and moral meaning systems (22). Consequently, understanding emotional regulation and rumination without considering cultural and religious dimensions may provide an incomplete understanding of psychological functioning. The findings of this review therefore support the necessity of culturally sensitive approaches in both research and psychological interventions.

Overall, the present review demonstrated that cultural religiosity may function as an important protective factor against emotional dysregulation and rumination through multiple cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual mechanisms. By promoting meaning-making, emotional acceptance, social support, resilience, and adaptive coping, religiosity may improve psychological adjustment and reduce vulnerability to anxiety-related cognitive patterns. Nevertheless, the review also suggests that the psychological effects of religiosity are complex and may vary depending on the nature of religious beliefs, emotional interpretation styles, and broader cultural contexts.

One of the limitations of the present review was the heterogeneity of the reviewed studies in terms of methodology, sample characteristics, and measurement tools. The included studies used different conceptualizations and operational definitions of religiosity, emotion regulation, and rumination, which may have influenced the comparability of findings. In addition, most of the reviewed studies employed correlational designs, limiting causal interpretations regarding the relationship between religiosity and emotional functioning. Another limitation was that a substantial proportion of studies focused primarily on student or adolescent populations, thereby reducing the generalizability of findings to broader demographic groups. Furthermore, cultural differences among studies may have influenced the observed relationships between religiosity and psychological outcomes.

Future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs to clarify the causal mechanisms linking religiosity, emotion regulation, and rumination. Researchers are encouraged to investigate the differential effects of intrinsic versus extrinsic religiosity on emotional adjustment and cognitive vulnerability. Comparative cross-cultural studies may also provide valuable insights into how cultural contexts shape the psychological functions of religiosity. In addition, future studies should examine potential mediating variables such as resilience, distress tolerance, social support, mindfulness, and cognitive

flexibility. Greater attention should also be devoted to clinical populations and vulnerable groups in order to better understand the therapeutic implications of culturally integrated psychological interventions.

From a practical perspective, the findings of the present review highlight the importance of integrating culturally sensitive and spiritually informed approaches into psychological counseling, educational programs, and mental health interventions. Educational institutions and mental health professionals may benefit from incorporating adaptive religious and spiritual resources into emotional skills training and resilience-building programs. Interventions emphasizing mindfulness, acceptance, emotional awareness, and meaning-focused coping may be particularly effective in reducing rumination and improving emotional regulation. Moreover, strengthening supportive social and family environments grounded in healthy cultural and religious values may contribute to improved psychological well-being and emotional security among adolescents and young adults.

### **Authors' Contributions**

All authors equally contributed to this study.

### **Declaration of Interest**

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

### **Transparency of Data**

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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