Faith-based Social Entrepreneurship: Improving Mosque's Socio-Economic Values in Emerging Country

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ABSTRACT

The religious perspective in the literature on social entrepreneurship remains largely unexplored, resulting in a scarcity of studies that analyze social entrepreneurship through a religious lens. Social entrepreneurship, including its manifestation in religious organizations as faith-based social enterprises, has emerged as a significant innovation in addressing diverse social issues, with the vast number of mosques in Indonesia presenting a promising opportunity to contribute to the benefit of the community's well-being. This study aims to identify the transformation process at the Masjid Ar Rahmah Surabaya and its impacts on social welfare considering its successful establishment as a faith-based social enterprises over the past five years, managing multiple business units and generating social benefits. Employing a case study, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document studies. The findings of the study present a model consisting of stages such as opportunity recognition, business establishment, resource acquisition, and organizational reconfiguration. These insights have implications for addressing social issues and enhancing community welfare in Indonesia and other emerging countries.

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Introduction

Over the last few years, the notion of social entrepreneurship has flourished across corporate, public, and non-profit fields. Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a global
trend that affects society through innovative approaches to address social issues. Amid the prevailing economic climate, social entrepreneurship aims to solve social issues, fostering not only social progress but also contributing to economic growth (Ahmad & Bajwa, 2023) and sustainable development (Bansal et al., 2023), especially in developing countries. The surge in global enthusiasm for social entrepreneurship can be attributed in large part to the remarkable achievements of influential social entrepreneurs such as Muhammad Yunus, who was named a Nobel laureate in 2006 for his ground-breaking work with Grameen Bank, which revolutionized welfare through the innovative concept of micro-loans. Social entrepreneurship has become one of the most powerful economic strategies to tackle social challenges, alleviate hunger, increase job opportunities, and foster strong relationships between social enterprise institutions and the community (Boulven et al., 2018; Kruse et al., 2021; Mulyaningsih & Ramadani, 2017), and even attenuate the detrimental effects of marginalization in society (Qureshi et al., 2023).

The field of social entrepreneurship involves a diverse range of actors and motivations, leading to multiple definitions of the concept (Canestrino et al., 2020; Dacin et al., 2010). While lacking a universally accepted definition, social entrepreneurship encompasses a wide array of socially beneficial projects and activities. Scholars describe social entrepreneurship as entrepreneurial activity with a built-in social purpose (Cherrier et al., 2018), involving actions and strategies to enhance societal well-being through new initiatives or creative management of existing ventures (Zahra et al., 2009). Some emphasize that social entrepreneurship integrates the economic mission of entrepreneurship with social objectives (Chell et al., 2016; Saebi et al., 2019). Regardless of varying definitions, the literature often emphasizes that the purpose of social entrepreneurship is to provide both social and economic benefits (Doherty et al., 2014; Saebi et al., 2019; Santos, 2012; Wu et al., 2020).

In recent decades, social entrepreneurs have made remarkable contributions to addressing social problems and generating social impact through numerous examples of social innovations (Mulyaningsih & Ramadani, 2017). At the grassroots, the voluntary sector is increasingly playing an important role in community development, with new research revealing the formation of a hybrid social enterprise model that combines aspects from the business and non-profit sectors. This novel strategy not only enhances the organization but also secures the mission’s long-term sustainability (Noor et al., 2018). Among these charitable industries, faith-based non-profit organizations have also contributed a great deal around the world to promoting health and well-being (Foster et al., 2022), increasing vaccination confidence, and solving vaccination inequalities (Syed et al., 2023), feeding the hungry and caring for the sick, serving as social entrepreneurs in the quest for societal change for hundreds or even thousands of years (Alderson, 2012; Clarke & Ware, 2015). In particular, the practice of social entrepreneurship in any non-profit organization, including faith-based organization, enables dual bottom line of transformational social change and fiscal success efforts (Shier & Handy, 2015; Wilburn & Wilburn, 2014).

On the other hand, social entrepreneurship is primarily analyzed from a Western perspective, and frequently overlooks the religious dimension, with Western studies typically separating social and commercial entrepreneurship from religious obligations due to the perception of entrepreneurship as distinct from religious duties in Western culture. It has resulted in a paucity of religious literature on social entrepreneurship (Almarri, 2014; Mulyaningsih & Ramadani, 2017). However, there are also a few studies on faith-based
organizations that have been practicing philanthropy and social entrepreneurship, e.g., Buddha Tzu Chi Movement (Yan, 2012) and some faith-based schools in Kenya (D’Agostino et al., 2019), China (Carino, 2016), Malaysia (Aliyasak et al., 2019; Boulven et al., 2018; Kamaruddin et al., 2018; Ali et al., 2019) and Indonesia (Anngadwita et al., 2015; Budiman & Sadewa, 2018; Erguig et al., 2019; Hati & Idris, 2019; Rohimat, 2020). In the meantime, while these studies have focused on faith-based organizations, entrepreneurship, and their relationship with religiosity, they have not provided a thorough understanding of best practice models of faith-based social entrepreneurship, especially in the context of practice in religious developing countries such as Indonesia.

According to the World Bank, approximately three billion individuals are living in poverty worldwide, with Muslim countries accounting for approximately 35 percent of this population. Several empirical studies have reported social problems in many Muslim countries, such as unequal income distribution, high unemployment, lower living standards, lack of public infrastructure, and unequal health and education services (Hoque et al., 2015). Indonesia, as a developing nation, is home to the world’s largest Muslim population, reflecting the significant presence of Muslims in the country (Anngadwita et al., 2015). Similar to other Muslim countries, Indonesia encompasses diverse cultures, regional languages, races, ethnicities, religions, and beliefs, where religious principles are integral to daily lives, inseparable from their social and economic endeavors (Anngadwita et al., 2015). Religious thought through faith-based social entrepreneurship can therefore be a solution to social problems in Indonesia and, more broadly, in other emerging economies.

Mosques, as faith-based non-profit organizations, have the potential to contribute to community development. Several studies have demonstrated that mosques can generate income through entrepreneurial activities, promoting social values, and benefiting the local community by increasing their income through such events. To actively engage in social entrepreneurship initiatives, mosques should adopt a faith-based social enterprise approach in their management practices (Aliyasak et al., 2019; Fauzi & Abdullah, 2016; Omar et al., 2017; Razak et al., 2014; Rohimat, 2020). According to the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, there are around 800,000 mosques in Indonesia but this count is still ongoing and may increase. In each neighbourhood, there is at least one mosque or mushalla (small mosque) serving around 150 families. Given the large number of mosques, developing them as faith-based social enterprises can be a strategic approach to addressing social issues in Indonesia swiftly. Entrepreneurial activities at mosques would also increase the attractiveness of mosques for more community members to come to the mosque (Fadzil et al., 2019).

Masjid Ar Rahmah Surabaya is a mosque in Indonesia that has successfully evolved into a faith-based social enterprise. Since its establishment in November 2018, the mosque has formed different business units and witnessed significant growth. This development has benefited the mosque, the congregation, and the local community significantly. In mosques, social entrepreneurship entails undertaking commercial activities motivated by social motives rather than profit, resulting in a business practice intended at alleviating social challenges and earning cash for communal goals rather than personal benefit (Aliyasak et al., 2019).

It is worth noting, however, that social entrepreneurship practices in Indonesian mosques are still relatively new and less well-known among Muslims, owing to a lack of awareness, visibility, and research in this field (Kormishkina et al., 2019). Empirical studies
examining the characteristics of faith-based social enterprises and organizations engaged in social entrepreneurship are scarce (Alderson, 2012; Borquist, 2021; Oham, 2015; Rundle, 2014). Therefore, this study investigates Masjid Ar Rahmah Surabaya’s development into a faith-based social enterprise and the socioeconomic values it has reinforced. The study intends to present a transformation model for faith-based social businesses by demonstrating how a mosque might turn into one. The mosques chosen for this study meet the criteria specified by Aliyasak et al. (2019), which include being waqf institutions, managing infaq money, and engaging in systematic fund management investments to create profits that support mosque program development. Our research adds to the empirical literature by investigating the practice of faith-based social entrepreneurship in emerging nations, particularly Indonesia.

Method

Research Design

A case study was used to investigate modern phenomena in-depth and in actual settings, particularly where and where the distinctions between the phenomena may not be obvious. Typically, archives, interviews, and observations are combined to gather data for a case study technique (Yin, 2017). To provide a comprehensive understanding, this research employed qualitative methods and a case study approach, enabling an inductive exploration of the research question (Eisenhardt, 1989). This design was chosen because inductive research case studies are well suited to issue formulation in relation to investigating contemporary phenomena in-depth and real-world contexts (Yin, 2017).

Data Sources

Trustworthiness was carried out using credibility criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which reflects the extent to which the study results correspond to facts and information in the field. To test trust, credibility is checked by triangulating data by using more than one data source. We used a variety of data sources, including key individuals involved in faith-based social entrepreneurship activities. Semi-structured interviews with these informants were the primary data source. A purposive sampling approach was employed to select six informants, including the mosque director, Chief Operation Officer (COO), head of Human Resource Development (HRD), head of Baitul Maal, and two beneficiaries. The procedure involved scheduling interviews, which necessitated the study team formally requesting each participant. Next, the date and location for the interviews were decided. The informants talked about how Masjid Ar Rahmah transformed into FBSE and contributed to several social activities. Some documents, such as the mosque’s yearly plan dan report, served as the primary, secondary data source in the early stages of this study. Observations on organizational meetings dan several social activities also complete the data collected.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study was guided by grounded theory, and the coding process followed specific phases outlined in Gioia (2013). First, the typical phenomena mentioned in the text were identified, labeled, and categorized as part of open coding. Second, axial coding connected the categories to the subcategories, evaluating the
relationship with the data. The third step was selective coding. The categories were combined around the primary categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). When each category was sufficiently supported by the coding findings and no new information emerged from the data, the coding procedure involved numerous rounds, and repeating categories was halted.

Results

To analyze the data, the researchers employed the Gioia method (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia et al., 2013), which helped in visualizing the data structure, as depicted in Figure 1. This analysis was carried out by identifying the initial concepts grouped into first-order ones. The concept of the first order reflects the grouping of informant statements containing similar themes. Based on the grouping of first-order concepts, the next stage consisted of a second-order concept that determined the subthemes and themes for each group. This study generated nine sub-themes derived from informants’ statements in the second-order concept. From these subthemes, the categorization of themes was determined based on the similarity of the subthemes that produce the aggregate dimensions. The research findings highlight significant concepts regarding the implementation of faith-based social entrepreneurship, particularly in terms of how the mosque enhanced its socio-economic values by transforming into a faith-based social enterprise, and the specific values that were created.

Social Entrepreneurship Motivation

Masjid Ar Rahmah Surabaya was established in 2012 with the aspiration of becoming an exemplary mosque that embodies the comprehensive functions of a mosque, inspired by the practices during the time of the Prophet and his companions. At the beginning of its period, Masjid Ar Rahmah Surabaya strengthened its function of worship services and educational functions in society. In addition to strengthening quality standards in worship services, Masjid Ar Rahmah Surabaya expanded its functions through various educational services for various segments of society. Among them are general studies, Al Quran education for children, Islamic adult education with a special curriculum for office employees, Fiqh education for Muslim women, and family private education services for the surrounding community. From 2012 to 2018, this mosque strengthened the social function of education and preaching. In 2015, the Ibadurrahman Surabaya Foundation, which oversees Masjid Ar Rahmah Surabaya in Surabaya, initiated a fully scholarship-funded college program aimed at training and nurturing future imams and mosque managers. In November 2018, Masjid Ar Rahmah Surabaya in Surabaya started to pioneer the practice of social entrepreneurship among the mosques in Surabaya. Several motivations generated this initiative.
In terms of the economy, the two main drivers for mosques are achieving financial independence and ensuring that financial resources circulate within the organization or foundation’s internal scope. There was a great eagerness to meet the financial needs of the mosque and make the mosque more autonomous. Previously, Masjid Ar Rahmah Surabaya’s financial needs were mostly met through regular infaq donations, daily contributions, and zakat and waqf collections. However, relying only on outside funding has hindered the mosque’s expansion, prompting the need for a more substantial and consistent funding source. Internalizing financial circulation within the firm will promote not just efficiency but also internal revenue production.

In addition to economic factors, non-economic motivations such as da’wah and social drivers also played a significant role. Along with the increasing interest of mosque worshippers and the public in the programs of worship, proselytizing, and education services organized by Masjid Ar Rahmah, various innovations, and developments in proselytizing programs continue to be carried out. This effort certainly requires greater financial resources. This motivation contributes to driving the practice of social
entrepreneurship at Masjid Ar Rahmah. The COO of Masjid Ar Rahmah, the initiator of social entrepreneurship describes:

“As our service programs are getting increasingly, the need for mosque funding and operational costs are also increasing. Then it is inevitable that the mosque must be independent. In addition, our mosque also has various educational institutions that require high operational costs.”

The social motivation was another type of motivation. The community surrounding the mosque, particularly mosque congregations, faces a variety of societal issues. Members of the Mosque Management Board reveal that they frequently receive complaints from congregations about the challenges they confront, such as family harmony damage caused by debt, congregations who have retired from work and are unable to satisfy their daily necessities, and poor orphans in the mosque’s vicinity.

**The Transformation into Faith-based Social Enterprise**

From the results of the in-depth interviews, the process of introducing these opportunities is described as follows: Firstly, there were business opportunities from the gaps in current services. For instance, with over 120 Ar Rahmah college students requiring three meals a day, along with 250 Al Qur’an education students and 125 congregation members with regular needs, there is a significant potential for growth in the catering company and retail business unit. Secondly, the free iftar distribution program, which provides up to 500 food portions during Ramadan and regular iftar on Sundays and Thursdays, can be made more efficient through internal procurement by establishing self-managed catering and retail business units within Masjid Ar Rahmah Surabaya.

Identifying the opportunities mentioned, the faith-based social entrepreneurship practice starts with the business unit in the catering service sector. After the catering business unit had been running for almost a year and made a profit, this profit was then managed to reopen a new business unit in the retail sector in September 2019. This backward vertical integration effort also facilitates the supply of raw materials for the catering business unit. It simplifies needs shopping for the surrounding community and campaigns for the spirit of shopping among fellow Muslims. This business unit also spawned three new business lines in 2020, namely the traditional health drink business line “Si Enom” and “Si Dele” and the rice production business line “Si Bulir.” To preserve its business units during the COVID-19 outbreak, Masjid Ar Rahmah Surabaya created services as a supplier for home shops in the neighboring community, which are largely owned by widows and the poor.

This development is inextricably linked to Masjid Ar Rahmah’s efforts to discover opportunities, prioritize the most profitable opportunities for early company development, and make efforts such that earnings in one enterprise can result in the emergence of another.

“Ar Rahmah catering is our first step since we already have a market, mainly students. Furthermore, we are interested in satisfying the requirements of mosque attendees by providing meals. As an example, consider the supply of iftar. The benefits we get from these two services are used to increase the service for the external. A few months after Ar Rahmah Catering began, we received a dividend of 200 million, which we utilized to construct Ar Rahmah Mart. Similarly,
Baitul Maal Ar Rahmah, whose actual cash was borrowed, was eventually repaid by Ar Rahmah catering revenues ". (Director of Masjid Ar Rahmah)

The Ar Rahmah Mosque’s numerous business lines continue to expand as a result of these developments. Masjid Ar Rahmah currently manages Ar Rahmah Catering, Ar Rahmah Mart, Aqiqoh Service, Ar Rahmah Water, and Ar Rahmah global barakah, which is in charge of construction cast, and printing services. This business unit is also strengthened by productive waqf of goat and cattle farming and potato farming. This productive waqf business is carried out in collaboration with several networks of breeders/farmers in various cities in Java. In addition, Baitul Maal Ar Rahmah, as a unit for collecting zakat, infap, sadaqah, and waqf, is also a supporting element of the network of units in this social enterprise.

Masjid Ar Rahmah faced challenges in operating its various business entities due to limited resources. To overcome this, the mosque developed a business strategy based on its initial business concept. In the case of launching the food service, Masjid Ar Rahmah Surabaya required an investment of 150 million rupiahs, which is a significant amount for a non-profit institution like a mosque. Building strong communication and trust with stakeholders, including the mosque’s governing foundation, donors, and congregations, became crucial. With the foundation’s support, the mosque eventually managed to secure the necessary funds, but it required time and extensive discussions.

In the early days, the demands for human resources were handled directly by the mosque administration, except for operating employees who required specialized expertise. After a period of operation, the recruitment of new workers continues to prioritize families of the mosque congregation and the surrounding community. In the first stages of establishing a social company, the entrepreneurial spirit, initiative, and creativity are most important.

In optimizing and orchestrating these resources, adaptability, and reconfiguration are the main keys to the transformation of mosques into a social enterprise. In addition to the process of acquiring and reconfiguring resources, changes in the organizational order are an important demand. With the increasing number of units under the mosque, structural reconfiguration has been carried out by Masjid Ar Rahmah as an important step in the alignment, synchronization, and orchestration of each of the business units and proselytizing units. Finally, structural reconfiguration does not only occur at the business unit level but includes all components under the Foundation. In implementing this and adopting the corporation system, Masjid Ar Rahmah acts as a holding company in charge of various units in the foundation.

Social Values Creating

Since its establishment, Masjid Ar Rahmah Surabaya has the vision to become a strong mosque organization that strengthens the surrounding community. With the practice of social entrepreneurship, Masjid Ar Rahmah Surabaya can produce a variety of social values for the surrounding community. These social values can generally be grouped into social empowerment, spiritual enhancement, and economic support.

One of Masjid Ar Rahmah’s most popular social empowerment services is free medical care. The neighborhood values the free health care provided six days a week. Despite the fact that only general practitioner health services have been established, the
number of patients on a daily basis usually always exceeds the quota. The Ar Rahmah clinic is expected to continue to develop into a free maternity hospital in the future. In addition, educational scholarships for orphans and indigent children are one of the strategic services oriented toward developing human resources in the future. With this program, underprivileged families are expected to be empowered and have improved well-being in life in the future. Another example of a social program that also has the value of empowering underprivileged communities is the service of providing free wells for inland communities.

The second form of social value created by Masjid Ar Rahmah is spiritual enhancement. With the income generated through social entrepreneurship, Masjid Ar Rahmah can develop its educational services for free, such as group and family-based Qur'an teaching services. In addition, the mosque’s proselytizing program is also increasingly lively, along with the development of a free lunch service for worshippers every after the congregational zuhr prayer.

The last type of generated social value is economic support. The growing business units of Masjid Ar Rahmah have opened up various new jobs. Masjid Ar Rahmah prioritizes unemployment from underprivileged people in mosques to fill some of these job posts. For example, most of Ar Rahmah’s employees are widows who are indeed recruited to help their family’s economic needs. In addition to these social values, farmer and rancher empowerment programs and food assistance for underprivileged communities are examples of social value and economic support resulting from this mosque-based social entrepreneurship.

Masjid Ar Rahmah Surabaya has delivered significant benefits to the mosque institution, congregation, and local community in less than two years since its formation as a social enterprise. The mosque has acquired greater independence, improved social values, and increased religious significance in the community by transitioning into a social enterprise. As a result, the profits created by the social enterprise currently account for around 30 percent of the mosque workers’ salaries. The successful running of numerous business units has created work possibilities for the local community, enhanced local stores by supplying reasonable items, allowed for the purchase of operable cars, and supported congregants with debt repayment.

Discussion

The existing research predominantly focuses on social entrepreneurship from a Western perspective, often overlooking the religious aspect of this concept (Almari 2014). As a result, there is a paucity of literature on religiously motivated social entrepreneurship. Previous research has shown that social entrepreneurship is practiced in mosques (Adnan, 2015; Budiman & Sadewa, 2018; Fadzil et al., 2019; Fauzi & Abdullah, 2016; Omar et al., 2017; Razak et al., 2014), however, the faith-based social entrepreneurship transformation process is less frequently covered in-depth. This research aims to investigate faith-based social enterprise practices in mosque management, highlighting key elements and implementation models so that it may be used as a guide for other mosques considering adopting similar procedures.

From the findings of the study, a key factor for the success of a faith-based social enterprise is its ability to quickly adapt and reconfigure the organization as it evolves into a new model of mosque management. In the context of strategic management, this ability is
known as a dynamic capability, as defined by Teece et al. (1997) refers to an organization’s capacity to integrate, build, and adjust its internal and external competencies in response to a rapidly changing environment. This capability contributes to superior business performance in the long run (Teece, 2007).

Although some researchers (Corner & Ho, 2010; Ince & Hahn, 2020; Vézina et al., 2019) have sought to study various dynamic capabilities of social enterprises, a comprehensive framework that represents the significant dynamic capability of social enterprises is still lacking. Moreover, the specific factors that influence the development of dynamic capability in social enterprises remain unclear. The transformation of mosques into faith-based social enterprises requires dynamic capabilities in achieving social and business goals and managing tensions between these goals (Ince & Hahn, 2020), in addition to the spiritual and proselytizing missions that have been owned since the beginning. With these dynamic capabilities, mosques can build, expand, exploit, and preserve resource bases and competencies that support their new framework of achieving long-term superior performance (Teece, 2007; Vézina et al., 2019).

Several related examples have been found in previous studies. Specific skills to gather and reorganize resources are needed to create social value through the development and modification of competence in social enterprises (Corner & Kearins, 2013). These skills are very distinct from those whose main objective is the development of economic value (Hall et al., 2012). Because achieving both social and commercial aims at the same time frequently leads to identity issues (Kannothra et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2013), social enterprises frequently experience these tensions (Smith et al., 2013). According to Desa and Basu (2013) and Doherty et al. (2014), this leads to issues in obtaining and mobilizing resources, which creates dynamic conflicts in social enterprise functioning. Consequently, social enterprises require certain skills to manage resources and respond flexibly to deal with these conflicts (Vallaster et al., 2021).

We propose a model of faith-based social enterprise implementation in mosques in
Figure 2. Strong motivation drives the implementation of faith-based social entrepreneurial activities in mosques and religious groups. A mosque’s success potential increases as its motivation grows. Four important stages are involved in the transformation of mosques into faith-based social enterprises. It begins with identifying opportunities, then moves on to building enterprises that take into account market potential and profitability. The organization’s dynamic capabilities are reflected in the latter two stages, which involve satisfying resource needs and adjusting the organization through reconfiguration. This transformation process yields social values such as empowerment, spiritual growth, and economic assistance, which are the primary goals of faith-based social businesses.

The model derived from this study contributes to the growth of social entrepreneurship literature, particularly in its examination of the stages of faith-based social enterprise development at the macro level. According to Klarin and Suseno (2022), the literature pertaining to the process of building social enterprise at the macro and micro levels is still in its infancy and requires further investigation. In addition, this study highlights the necessity for structural reconfiguration of firms undergoing transformation into social businesses as a manifestation of Dynamic Capacities Theory. Notably, the applications of the dynamic capacity to non-profit organizations have not been extensively discussed in the literature (da Costa et al., 2020). In addition to its theoretical contributions, the proposed transformation model in this study can serve as a practical guide for other mosques aiming to become faith-based social enterprises.

Given the prevalent social challenges encountered by various institutions such as government, religion, and education, it becomes imperative for all these entities to actively seek solutions to address these social problems (Sud et al., 2009). Consequently, it is crucial to conduct further research and implement faith-based social entrepreneurship programs in mosques that can contribute to the broader community (Aliyasak et al., 2019).

The field of social entrepreneurship has witnessed significant growth as a means of addressing diverse social challenges. This trend is evident in religious organizations, including mosques, that embrace the concept of faith-based social enterprise. Given the substantial number of mosques in Indonesia, they possess significant potential to serve as faith-based social enterprise entities and drive positive changes in community well-being.

Conclusion

This study has described how mosques can increase their social and economic value by implementing faith-based social entrepreneurship. It has provided significant insights into the drivers behind the adoption of faith-based social entrepreneurship, the transformation process involved, and the resulting social values. The study highlights the crucial role of adaptability and dynamic capabilities in the success of faith-based social entrepreneurship. Furthermore, a practical model for implementing faith-based social entrepreneurship in other mosques is proposed based on the findings of this study.

However, this study, like all research studies, has limitations. One problem is that it only looked at one mosque as a case study. Future research using a multi-case study approach would help us better comprehend this strategic challenge. Furthermore, examining the many forms of dynamic capabilities in faith-based social entrepreneurship as well as their growth and development present interesting paths for future research.
Authors’ Declaration

The authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study. The authors took responsibility for data analysis, interpretation and discussion of results. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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