Emotional Stability, Trust and Sense of Self among Partners of Narcissists

Ifra Mahmood¹, Mishal Najam^{1*}, Ayesha Sarfraz² **Abstract**

This study aims to investigate narcissist spouses' emotional stability, self-esteem, and trust levels. One hundred married women and one hundred married men made up the total sample size of 200 (N=200). Ames et al. (2006), Rempel et al. (1985), Flury and Ickes (2007), and Goldberg (1992) developed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16, Trust in Close Relationship Scale, and Factor IV Scale of Emotional Stability, respectively, which were employed as research instruments in this study. The wife's trust, emotional stability, and self-esteem were all significantly correlated with her husband's narcissism. Spouses of males who scored high on the narcissism scale had different levels of self-confidence, emotional stability, and trust. The effects of a narcissistic partner's personality on a spouse's emotional stability, trust, and self-esteem can be better understood by the current research findings. In addition, the current research encourages a deeper comprehension of these aspects, which helps narcissistic partners get better insight.

Keywords: Emotional Stability, Narcissism, Sense of Self, Trust

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Introduction

Narcissism is characterized by extreme self-involvement, which leads to a disregard for the needs of others. On occasion, practically everyone engages in narcissistic behavior. Narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) patients have personalities characterized by intense self-involvement and continuous disdain for others. Narcissists are consumed with their own demands and are sometimes referred to as 'narcissists,' yet they are also fascinated with other people's acceptance. They have no close relationships with others around them; instead, they are a means to an

end, just like admirers. They may perpetrate narcissistic abuse, either by exploiting others to fuel their egos or by neglecting the needs of people who depend on them (Caligor et al., 2015). Living with a narcissistic partner can have a host of psychological ramifications. As a result of narcissistic abuse, anxiety and depression are common. You may experience constant feelings of concern, unease, and emotional distress from the significant stress you are under, especially if you are unsure what to expect from their actions (Blatt & Shichman, 1983).

Narcissists may be verbally and mentally abusive because they will intentionally undermine their partner's affection, selfesteem, and character for selfish benefit. Narcissistic abuse might include mind games, stealing, gas lighting, isolating the spouse manipulation, from support, lying, accusations, projection, name calling, threats, bullying, and withholding (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998). Narcissistic abuse syndrome is a disorder that develops after a person has lived with a narcissist or spent significant time with one. People who have experienced narcissistic abuse typically question their own

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worth or well-being. Many people who have experienced narcissistic abuse struggle to connect with reality. Some of the symptoms are comparable to those of a patient with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as distrust, emotional attachment, self-annihilation, despair, anxiety, and psychological hostility (Howard, 2009).

The ability to sustain emotional stability in the face of adversity is referred to as emotional stability. Neuroticism and mental instability are its polar opposites. Emotionally healthy people can cope with minor stress and pressure in their daily lives without becoming upset. concerned. apprehensive, tense, or furious. In the face of modest emotional stress, they will maintain their composure. Stable emotions empower an individual to adopt a holistic and healthy outlook towards the challenges of life. This ability to organize one's thoughts and observe things in a structured manner enables a person to develop reality-based thinking, decisionmaking, and evaluate one's abilities. Emotions, beliefs, and actions are formed to aid in understanding life's facts, as well as the causes and events that lead to sad situations (Peterson & DeHart, 2014).

The Self Theory is concerned with the selfimage of an individual and their perception of relationships and other aspects of life. Carl Rogers has significant contribution in the theory of Self (Rogers, 1946).

Trusting a romantic partner can be hard particular if that partner has narcissistic tendencies. At times, getting over dating anxiety and fear of rejection to even communicate with someone is a struggle. Dating and marriages, after all, can be a punishing experience sometimes. In addition, coping with commitment problems and working through conflicts can also be troublesome in longer-term relationships (Lawrence et al., 2009).

Narcissists, on the other hand, often perceive themselves as the victim. However, the more one communicates with a narcissist, the less they tend to like them (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). According to audiotaped conversations evaluated by independent and blind coders, narcissists are less charming than non-narcissists (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). According to Wink (1991), overt narcissists' wives characterized them as irate, frank, egocentric, self-centered, intolerant, haughty, demanding, and combative.

Research suggests that narcissists are less committed to their relationships compared to non-narcissists as they believe they have more options for potential partners (Campbell et al., 1996). Moreover, higher levels of narcissism are linked to more vindictive, domineering, and controlling behavior towards others, as well as greater intrusiveness in relationships (Ogrodniczuk et al., 2009).

In 2019, Czarna and his associates employed a sample of 405 individuals to demonstrate the association between dispositional rage and hostility and grandiose and susceptible narcissism. It has also been demonstrated that a high level of neuroticism results in a lack of emotional self-regulation, which in turn causes a high level of animosity or dispositional rage. Emotional stability, however, can assist grandiose narcissists in avoiding the internal elements aggressiveness (Czarna et.al., 2019).

Interpersonally, both vulnerable and grandiose narcissists can exhibit malicious, officious, and cold traits, although the primary motives for their behaviors can differ based on the subtype. Grandiose narcissists tend to have high self-esteem, experience less interpersonal distress, and display avoidant attachment style compared to vulnerable narcissists. Conversely, vulnerable narcissists tend to have low selfexperience high interpersonal esteem, distress, and display an anxious attachment style. Research suggests that individuals with grandiose narcissism tend to respond with aggression when they feel their self-esteem is

threatened (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003; Green & Charles, 2019).

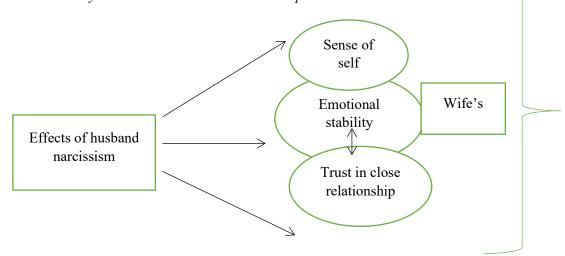
A 2019 study by Kwiastkowska et al. sought to ascertain the relationship between grandiose narcissism and several aspects of trust. 727 of the individuals were chosen for the study. The findings showed that antagonistic narcissism was positively correlated with a negative self-other trust concept, whereas argentic narcissism was unrelated to any facet of trust. Additionally, a good attitude toward oneself and other individuals as honest was linked to communal narcissism.

The following hypotheses were investigated in this study:

H 1: The degree to which a husband narcissizes greatly affects his wife's capacity to trust, her emotional stability, and her feeling of self. H 2: men with high and moderate narcissism have different levels of self-confidence, emotional stability, and trust in close relationships.

H 3: Emotional stability and self-esteem are associated with trust in close relationships. H 4: Factors influencing trust in intimate relationships are positively correlated. H 5: The amount of trust in a serious relationship, emotional steadiness, and self-confidence vary with the length of a marriage.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Impact of Husband's Narcissism on Wife's Level of Sense of Self, Emotional Stability and Trust in Close Relationship



Method Participants

The study included 200 married individuals (100 males and 100 females) between the ages of 20 and 40. Only couples with narcissistic partners were included in the research. Specifically, only females who had been married to their partners for at least two years were made part of the study.

Procedure

To fulfill the purpose of the study, formal consent and permissions were obtained from the participants and authors for the use of their tools. Data collection was done based on inclusion/exclusion criteria. Participants were briefed about the nature and purpose of the current research before

administering the research questionnaires. Demographic details were collected at the beginning of the measuring instruments. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured. Participants were asked to fill out the questionnaires according to the instructions given.

Measures

Informed Consent & Demographic Sheet

An informed consent form, explaining that the research's goal was to collect data from couples and participants were made aware of the fact that their information would not be used for any other purpose. Participation was entirely voluntary, allowing individuals the choice to either decline or proceed as they wished. A demographic data form was developed for the study, drawing on expert opinions and available literature. Data was gathered regarding the participants' age, educational background, and duration of their marriages.

Narcissistic Personality Inventory

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-16) comprised 16 closed-ended questions designed to assess a partner's suspicion of narcissism in their spouse. The authors aim to provide researchers with further opportunities to explore the implications of narcissism (Raskin & Hall, 1979). The NPI-16 was a brief subclinical narcissism assessment tool with high face, internal, discriminant, and predictive validity.

Sense of Self Scale

The measure consisted of 12 items on a Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The design aimed to evaluate the four components of a weak sense of self as outlined by Ickes and Flury (2007). A sample of 302 participants revealed an average alpha of .86 for the original SOSS version, with the alpha coefficient consistently remaining at .86 when recalculated and analyzed by gender (Flury & Ickes, 2007).

Trust in Close Relationship Scale

This scale, created by Rempel and his colleagues in 1985, consists of 17 items

designed to evaluate individuals' trust levels in their partners. The scale utilized was a 7point Likert scale, with values ranging from 1, indicating strong disagreement, to 7, indicating strong agreement. The scale identifies three unique dimensions of confidence: predictability, dependability, and faith. The findings indicate that the overall reliability of the scale is .81, while the reliabilities for the subscales are .80 for faith, dependability, .72 for and .70 predictability (Jahangier & Batool, 2020).

The Factor IV Scale of Emotional Stability Emotional stability, often referred to as neuroticism, constitutes one of the Big Five personality traits. This pertains to the capacity to maintain emotional composure and equilibrium. The assessment utilized a 10-item Likert scale questionnaire focused on evaluating the neuroticism aspect of the Big Five personality traits (Goldberg, 1992). The response is measured using a Likert scale that ranges from 1 (extremely inaccurate) to 5 (completely accurate). The coefficient alpha for the Factor IV Scale of Emotional Stability was found to be .85.

Data Analysis

This study explored the relationships and effects of husbands' narcissistic traits on their wives' self-perception, trust levels, and emotional well-being. The analysis of the results was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, 21) software. The investigation utilized descriptive statistics, regression, correlation, and MANOVA analyses. Means and standard deviations were calculated obtain to descriptive statistics, and correlations were analyzed.

Results Table 1Simple Linear Analysis of the Relationship between a Husband's Narcissistic Traits and a Wife's Trust, Emotional Stability, and Self-perception (N=100)

Variable	В	SE	β	R^2	AR^2	F	p
TCR	11.103	2.842.	.367	.135	.126	15.26	.000
ES	-9.061	286	955	.911	.910	1004.33	.000
SOSS	-7.212	1.17	527	.278	.271	37.73	.000

Regression analysis was employed to examine whether the husband's level of narcissism serves as a predictor for the wife's levels of trust, emotional stability, and sense of self. The result of the regression analysis for trust indicated the overall model was significant (F(1, 98) = 15.26, p=.000) and the predictor explained 13.5% of the variance in the outcome variable (R=.367. $R^2=.135$). It was found that husband's level of narcissism significantly predicted wife's level of trust ($\beta = .367, p=.000$). Moreover, the result of the regression analysis for emotional stability indicated the overall model was significant (F)

(1, 98) = 1004.33, p=.000) and the predictor explained 91.1% of the variance in the outcome variable (R=.955., $R^2=.911$). It was found that husband's level of narcissism significantly predicted wife's level of emotional stability ($\beta = -.955$, p=.000). And the result of the regression analysis for sense of self indicated the overall model was significant (F(1, 98) = 37.73, p=.000) and the predictor explained 27.8% of the variance in the outcome variable (R=.527, $R^2=.278$). It was found that husband's level of narcissism significantly predicted wife's level of sense of self ($\beta = -527$, p=.000).

Table 2 *MANOVA Analysis of Variance in Husband's Level of Narcissism with Wife's Level of Trust in Close Relationship, Sense of Self and Emotional Stability (N=100)*

Measures	High(N)	Low(N)	F (1, 98)	η^2
	M (SD)	M (SD)		
ES	41.06(1.66)	32.0(.00)	1004.33	.911
SOSS	55.30(6.47)	57.38(7.55)	2.063	.021
TCR	19.98(16.52)	31.0(.71)	15.26	.135

Note. TCR= trust in close relationship, SOSS= sense of self scale, ES= emotional stability, inter=intermediate. N=narcissism

Using Pillai's trace, we find that a husband's narcissism has a significant effect on his wife's self-esteem, trust in close relationships, and emotional stability (V=.963, F (3, 96) = 826.78, p=.000). However, when we examine the outcome variables separately through univariate ANOVA, we find no significant effects of the husband's narcissism on his wife's level of sense of self F(1,98) = 2.063, p=.154, η 2 = .021 and significant effect of

husband's level of narcissism on wife's level of trust F(1,98) = 15.26, p=.00, $\eta 2 = .135$. And significant effect of husband's level of narcissism on wife's level of emotional stability F(1, 98) = 1004.33, p=.000, $\eta 2 = .911$.

Post Hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD post hoc criterion for significance indicated that husbands who have high narcissism their wives are more likely to be emotionally unstable (M = 41.06, SD = 1.66) as compared to husbands with low narcissism their wives are more emotionally stable (M = 32.0, SD = .00). Additionally, the wives of husbands with low narcissism showed more trust (M = 31.08, SD = .712) as compared to husbands

with high narcissism (M = 19.98, SD = 16.52). Moreover, husbands with low narcissism their wives have more sense of self (M = 57.38, SD = 7.55) as compared to husbands with high narcissism (M = 55.30, SD = 6.47).

Table 3Simple Linear Correlation between Trust in Close Relationship, Sense of Self and Emotional Stability (N = 100)

Measures	M (SD)	TCR	SOSS	ES
TCR	24.53 (14.61)	-	-	-
SOSS	56.34 (7.01)	94**	-	-
ES	38.02 (4.52)	57**	.73**	-

Note: TCR= trust in close relationship, SOSS= sense of self scale, ES= emotional stability ***p < .001

Person product moment correlation was used to build the correlation matrix, which examines the bivariate link between self-confidence and trust in close relationships. According to the data, a strong negative correlation exists between self-confidence and trust in close relationships (r = -.94, p = .000). In addition, look at the correlation between emotional stability and trust in close

relationships in a bivariate analysis. According to the results, the two variables are significantly inversely related (r = -.57, p = .000). Finally, look at the bivariate connection between emotional stability and self-esteem. There was a statistically significant positive link between emotional stability and sense of self (r = .73, p = .000).

Table 4 *Inter-correlations between Trust in Close Relationship Subscales (N = 100)*

Measures	M(SD)	Dependency	Faith	Predictability
Dependency	30.12 (8.45)	-	-	_
Faith	28.76 (7.92)	.91**	-	-
Predictability	20.45 (6.33)	41**	69**	-

^{***}*p* < .001

In order to look at the bivariate link between the trust subscales in intimate relationships, we used Pearson's product moment correlation to create the correlation matrix. There is a strong positive correlation between faith items and reliance items, according to the analysis (r = .91, p = .000). Additionally, look at the predictability and dependency

components' bivariate relationship. According to the results, the two variables are negatively related (r = -.41, p = .000). Investigate the two-way connection between faith and predictability measures. There was a statistically significant negative association between faith items and predictability items (r=-.69, p=.000), according to the analysis.

Table 5 MANOVA Analysis of Variance in Duration of Marriage and Wife's Level of Trust, Sense of Self and Emotional Stability (N=100)

Measures	(2-4 years)	(5-7 years)	F (1, 98)	η^2
	M (SD)	M (SD)		
ES	37.83(4.54)	38.21(4.5)	.158	.002
SOSS	55.56(7.13)	54.55(6.88)	.487	.005
TCR	24.80(13.7)	22.05(15.45)	.861	.009

Note. TCR= trust in close relationship, SOSS= sense of self scale, ES= emotional stability p=ns

Using Pillai's trace, there was a nonsignificant effect of duration of marriage on wife's level of sense of self, trust and emotional stability V=.059, F (3, 96) = 2.006, p=.118.

Discussion

The present study investigated the correlation between emotional stability, trust, and sense of self in partners of narcissists. Moreover, this research also explores how the demographic differences are related to emotional stability, trust, and sense of self. The data was analyzed using SPSS-25, and statistical methods such as Pearson correlation, simple linear regression, and MANOVA were utilized.

Based on the descriptive analysis, the sample consisted of 200 individuals, with an equal distribution of 100 females and 100 males. Among the female participants, 68% were in the 20-30 age group, while 32% were in the 31-40 age group. Education levels varied from intermediate to Ph.D., with 2% of females having an intermediate degree, 81% having completed their bachelor's degree, 16% having completed their master's degree, and only 1% holding a Ph.D. Furthermore, it was found that all participants were married, with 97% reporting being married for 2 to 6 years and the remaining 3% of females reporting being married for 7 to 11 years.

The first hypothesis was that the husband's narcissism score would predict the wife's trust, emotional stability, and self-identity. Linear regression analysis findings suggest that the husband narcissism is a significant

predictor of the wife trust level ($\beta = .367$, p=.000), emotional stability ($\beta = -.955, p = .000$), and sense of self ($\beta = -527$, p = .000). Ali and colleagues (2011) have noted in their study the patriarchal system prevalent in Pakistan, where males, including husbands and fathers, hold dominant roles, and women face suppression. Often, women are not even given a choice in selecting their groom. Due to cultural barriers and gender discrimination, Pakistan face women in numerous challenges. Furthermore, the patriarchal system has a strong effect on women's psychological, physical, and emotional wellbeing (Iqbal & Fatmi, 2021). Similarly, if a husband exhibits narcissistic characteristics, he may have a substantial impact on his wife's level of trust, emotional stability, and selfesteem. Women are more likely to experience intimate relationship abuse, particularly from narcissistic spouses. Narcissism harms personal relationships in a variety of ways (Elise, 2018; Määttä et al., 2012).

The second hypothesis proposed that spouses of men with high and low degrees of narcissism differ in terms of intimate relationship trust, emotional stability, and self-identity. The outcomes of the investigation show that the husband's level of narcissism has a direct influence on the wife's level of trust, emotional stability, and self-

esteem. The Pillai's trace demonstrates that the husband's narcissism level has an impact on the wife's level of sense of self, trust in close relationship, and emotional stability (V = .96, F (3, 96) = 826.78, p = .000). The narcissistic traits of a husband influence the wife's trust and emotional stability, which can lead to marital problems over time. Victims of narcissistic partners, such as wives, may experience affected trust and anticipate emotional suffering, which can negatively impact their sense of self. The marital problems elevate over time and marital life begins to go downhill.

In their study, Lavner and colleagues (2016) proposed that personality traits influence marital functioning, and that the amount of narcissism influences marital quality and satisfaction. However, further study is needed to determine how the husband's level of narcissism affects the wife's trust, emotional stability, and sense of self. It should be mentioned that the patriarchal system and gender discrimination in some countries, such as Pakistan, might intensify the detrimental consequences of narcissism on women's wellbeing and personal relationships (Ali et al., 2011; Iqbal & Fatmi, 2021).

The study's third hypothesis is to establish a link between trust in close relationships, emotional stability, and sense of self. The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a substantial negative association between trust in intimate relationships and a feeling of self (r = -0.94, p = .000). In contrast to Western countries, Asian families mostly live in joint family systems. Thus, married women anticipate more workload, stress, family/marital issues. Although it was expected that trust in close relationships and emotional stability would be positively related to each other, the results showed variations (Borum, 2010). The discrepancy in the results is probably due to other factors that hinder emotional stability. The couple might not have trust issues, yet other problems, including environmental factors, experience

with in-laws (relationship with in-laws' family members), or personal factors (spousal support), could cause emotional instability that also affected the results (Girgis et al., 2011). On the other hand, the analysis (Pearson correlation) also reveals a significant positive relationship between the sense of self and emotional stability (r=0.73, p=.000). The sense of self and emotional stability positively complements each other (Veselska et al., 2010) because if someone has a good sense of self, they will have a clear self-concept and be more self-satisfied, resulting in high emotional stability.

The fourth hypothesis aims to examine the inter-correlation between the trust in a close relationship subscales. The analysis using Pearson correlation shows a significant positive relationship between the dependency subscale and the faith subscale (r = .913, p =.000). In addition, the results also indicate a significant negative relationship between the dependency subscale and the predictability subscale (r = -.415, p = .000), and a negative correlation between the faith subscale and the predictability subscale (r = -.697, p = .000). While Weijs and colleagues (2019) also reported a significant correlation between the subscales of trust in close relationships, they did not provide a clear description of the type of correlation. Moreover, in 1985, Holmes and colleagues conducted a study on trust in close relationships and reported that there is a significant correlation among the subscales of trust in a close relationship.

The fifth hypothesis sought to examine if the duration of marriage influences the amount of trust in a close relationship, emotional stability, and sense of self. The research results reveal that there was no significant influence of marital time on the wife's degree of self-esteem, trust, and emotional stability (V=.059, F (3, 96) = 2.006, p=.11). While longer relationships have been shown to have lower satisfaction compared to those in the initial stages (Lamkin et al., 2015), our study found that emotional stability, sense of self,

and trust were not significantly impacted by the duration of the marriage. In essence, a partner's narcissistic personality is the primary factor that affects a person's emotional stability, sense of trust, and sense of self. However, previous studies did not specifically explain the level of trust in a close relationship, emotional stability, and sense of self based on the duration of the marriage.

Conclusion

The present investigation verified the reliability and validity of the scales used. A strong inverse correlation between self-confidence and trust in close relationships was also discovered. Emotional stability and trust in close relationships were found to be significantly inversely related in the investigation. It is also determined that having a strong sense of who you are has a good correlation with being emotionally stable.

Intercorrelations between the subscales measuring trust in intimate relationships have also been demonstrated by the study. Additionally, conclusions based on linear regression revealed that the wife's degree of trust, emotional stability, and sense of self are significantly predicted by the husband's degree of narcissism. Additionally, it was discovered that the wife's degree of trust, emotional stability, and self-awareness differed from the husband's degree of In light of the demographic narcissism. variations, it was determined that the length of marriage had no discernible impact on the wife's degree of emotional stability, intimate relationship trust, and sense of self.

Limitations & Recommendations

However, it is important to exercise caution when interpreting these data, since multiple limitations need to be addressed. Firstly, the sample size of the study was limited to 100 couples (100 males and 100 females), which hinders the generalization of results. Therefore, the focus of future studies should be to increase the sample size to enhance the external validity of the findings. Secondly,

the current study utilized quantitative research methodologies. Qualitative research approaches such as in-depth interviews can be utilized to gain an in-depth knowledge of the topic. Conducting interviews with narcissistic partners can shed light on the abuse they may have experienced.

Implications

The study will contribute to the existing literature and would help new researchers. They would get information to support their study. They would not have to face literature limitations. The study of narcissism and romantic relationships also sheds light on how an exaggerated sense of self can impact interpersonal interactions. The effects of an inflated self-concept (operationally defined as narcissism, grandiosity, or positivity of self-views compared to a more objective norm) on relationship functioning are the subject of a modest but expanding collection of study. The core of this research is that selfinflation can have adverse effects across marriages. The current study adds to this amount of evidence by concentrating on the potentially damaging effects of self-love on a key set of aspects. Popular culture typically strengthens the fact that loving oneself is a requirement for loving others. The results of this research suggest that such claims should be made with caution. The conceptualization of self-love as narcissism is destructive to maintaining committed relationships. Additionally, it will develop insight among the people living with a narcissistic partner and make their partners seek professional assistance. Study findings will help in developing new interventions and treatment plans to help the spouses of people with narcissism. Further studies should be conducted on the national level or at least with a larger population ratio. Men are also victims of domestic violence and narcissistic abuse, which I acknowledge. There's been very little research done on men's experiences with these kinds of relationships. It's crucial analyze how narcissistic romantic

partnerships affect males so that clinicians can better assist them. Also, recent evidence suggests that female and male manifestations of narcissism differ, future research can focus on female narcissists and their responses to narcissistic injury in romantic relationships in order to gain a more complete picture of the impact of narcissism. Couple counseling approaches would be helpful for couples. The DSM-5 criteria for diagnosing NPD should be evaluated with more prudence and specificity. Future research should focus on identifying major variations in these people's interpersonal conflicts and addressing the underlying reasons for their concerns about desertion.

Ethics Statement

All the ethical standards of APA were met. Informed consent was taken in written form from all the respondents to participate in this study.

Contribution of Authors

Ifra Mahmood: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft Mishal Najam: Methodology, Writing – Reviewing & Editing

Ayesha Sarfraz: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing, Supervision

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the authors.

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Data Availability Statement

The datasets of the current study are not available publicly due to ethical reasons but are available from the corresponding author [M.N.] upon the reasonable request.

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