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## Evaluating the Socio-Economic Contributions of the Osun Osogbo Festival on Southwestern Nigeria: Insights for Sustainable Tourism Development

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### Abstract


The Osun Osogbo Festival is an important cultural heritage event and a well-known tourist attraction with significant social, cultural, and economic importance. This research examines the socio-economic impact of the festival on the local population and community. A concurrent research approach was utilized, combining both quantitative and qualitative data sources. The quantitative data involved distributing structured questionnaires to 189 festival participants using stratified random sampling techniques, as well as surveying 123 hotel operators and 20 taxi drivers. For the qualitative aspect, in-depth interviews were carried out with relevant stakeholders. Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics (including tables and percentages) and inferential statistics (notably regression analysis). The descriptive analysis revealed that 89.4% support sustainable tourism development, 95.3% are in favor of biodiversity conservation, and 88.9% reported social and community impact. Additionally, the findings indicated that 85% experienced increased sales during the festival. The regression analysis showed a p-value of 0.05, signifying a significant association between community involvement and cultural appreciation. In summary, the Osun Osogbo Festival has had a positive effect on the community. The study suggests that both government and community members should offer financial assistance, capacity-building initiatives, and training programs to help local businesses maximize the economic benefits stemming from the festival.

**Keywords:** Festival, Tourism, Socioeconomic, Sustainable tourism, Cultural heritage, Community development.

## 1 | Introduction

Tourism has emerged as a vital component of global economic growth, nurturing cultural exchange and socioeconomic development [1]. As a significant sector, tourism encompasses diverse subsectors and

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generates substantial economic value worldwide [2]. The industry's socioeconomic impacts on destinations and local communities are multifaceted, extending beyond the superficial appeal of scenic beauty and cultural attractions [3]. Sustainable tourism development aims to maximize positive socioeconomic effects while minimizing negative consequences.

This approach seeks to balance social progress, environmental preservation, and economic growth. The socioeconomic implications of tourism are far-reaching, encompassing both positive and negative outcomes. On one hand, tourism stimulates economic growth, generates employment opportunities, and enhances infrastructure development [4]. It promotes cultural preservation, heritage conservation, and intercultural understanding, thereby, enriching the social fabric of destinations and fostering community pride [5], [6]. On the other hand, rapid tourism growth can strain local resources, exacerbate environmental degradation, and disrupt traditional ways of life. Unequal distribution of tourism benefits can widen socioeconomic disparities, leading to issues of gentrification, cultural commodification, and social tensions.

In Nigeria, tourism has gained attention as a strategic sector for socioeconomic development, with the country boasting a rich cultural heritage, diverse natural attractions, and a vibrant festival calendar. The Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a premier ecotourism destination in southwestern Nigeria [7]. It is a revered cultural landscape that embodies the spiritual and traditional values of the Yoruba people, which evolved naturally over time [8]. The annual Osun Osogbo Festival, celebrating the goddess of fertility, attracts local and international tourists [4], [9], showcasing the potential of sustainable tourism and driving conservative efforts. Despite its significance, the festival's socioeconomic contributions to the local community and regional economy remain understudied.

This research aims to bridge this knowledge gap by assessing the socioeconomic contributions of the Osun Osogbo Festival, providing insights into its role in fostering sustainable tourism development in southwestern Nigeria. Grounded in the sustainable tourism theory and cultural tourism theory, this study has examined the complex relationships between tourism, culture, and sustainability, informing strategies for sustainable tourism development and community empowerment [6], [10]. This study displayed how Osun Osogbo Festival attracts tourists and subsequently lead to promoting socio economic activities such as revenue generations through tourism related activities, job creation and local business support. Also, Gravity model was utilized in this study.

## 2 | Material and Method

### 2.1 | Study Area

The study area is Osogbo, Osun State. It is situated at 7°46' North 4°34' East. It covers approximately 126.0 km<sup>2</sup>. Osogbo is situated northeast of Ibadan, south of Ilorin, and northwest of Akure. It also shares boundaries with Ikirun, Ilesa, Ede, Egbedore, Ogbomoso and Iragbiji. It is centrally located in Osun State and this makes it more easily accessible from any part of the State. It has an elevation of 320m. It has a tropical climate with rainfall (March to November) and the dry season (November to February) and an average annual temperature of 25.5° C (i.e. 77.8 degrees Fahrenheit) and 1361 Millimetres (53.6 inches) of precipitation [11].

It is a protected area covered by riparian forest, dry high forest, and derived savannah. The population as of National Population Census, 2006 was 156,694 people. Osogbo is popularly known as the trade center for a farming region with such produce as yams, cassava, maize, cotton, and tobacco. It is also renowned for tie and dye and is called "Home of Tie and Dye" because many traditional tie and dye industries are situated in Osogbo [12]. Osogbo witnessed a yearly celebration of Osun Osogbo festival which normally occurred along the river Osun. This annual event is always observed in August and is centered on the sacred grove of the river goddess called Osun. And this allows the flow of people from far and near to Osogbo. This event has gained the recognition of UNESCO [13].

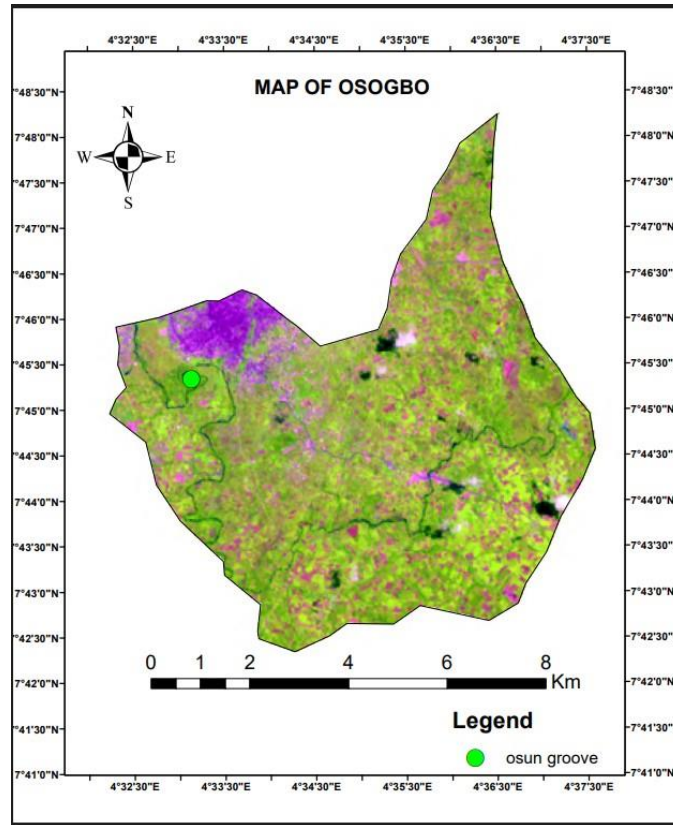


Fig. 1. Map of osogbo showing osun groove.

## 2.2 | Theoretical Framework

The theory underpinning this study is Gravity Model. The model has been one of the most commonly applied models not only in transportation studies but also in other aspects of urban and regional analysis. Its applications cover such wide-ranging areas such as commodity movement, travelling, migration, household relocation and communication, among others [14], [15]. Such applications have usually been in an attempt to replicate or forecast actual interaction. The model is based on the Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation which states that "two bodies in the universe attract each other in proportion to the product of their masses, and inversely to the square of distance between them" [14]. The work of [16] is the first adoption of the Newtonian Law to human interaction. The greater the number collected in a given space, the greater the attractive force there is. Gravitation, here as everywhere, follows the direct ratio of mass and the inverse ratio of distance. Thereafter, [17-19] applied varying versions of the gravity formulation to interaction; the first two to migration and the last two to retail sales. Also, [20] in a study utilized gravity parameters to explore the relationship between interaction patterns and regional development. It was later used to articulate and expose spatial inequalities in development in the study area. The model has been a focus of intense study for the past decades. The model can be mathematically stated as follows:

$$I_{ij} = a \cdot P_i P_j / d_{ij}^2$$

where

$I_{ij}$  = volume of interaction between two places  $i$  and  $j$ .

$d_{ij}$  = distance separating the two places  $i$  and  $j$ .

$P_i$  = population of  $i$ .

$P_j$  = Population of  $j$ .

$a$  = constant of proportionality.

$b$  = exponent of distance.

In the context of this study, the parameters of the model can further be interpreted thus:

$I_{ij}$  = the number of tourists coming to tourist centre  $j$  from settlement  $i$ .

$d_{ij}$  = the distance between tourist centre  $j$  and settlement  $i$ .

$p_i$  = population size of settlement  $i$ .

$p_j$  = size of tourist centre  $j$ .

$a$  = constant of proportionality.

$b$  = exponent of distance.

The model has some empirical support which affirm that the number of people making a journey to a particular factory or shopping centre declines as the length of the trip increases; and that this decline is not usually uniform but rather, the fall-off or distance decay, is at first steep and then increasingly gently. This is because, for instance, people in one location, because of one reason or another, may possess greater interaction propensity than those in other locations.

This analogy is best based on [21] assertion that movement of goods, information and people within a social system, is an expression of his “principle of least effort” whereby inter community interaction is such as to minimize the total work of the system. In other words, it attempts to represent the potential interaction between any population point and all service points. The model therefore, will provide useful insight especially when combined with regression model (i.e. Gravity – regression model) in providing a framework that could be used in a hypothetico-deductive system to test hypotheses about human locational and spatial behavior for the use of tourist/recreational centres.

### 3 | Data Collection

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods to evaluate the socio-economic contributions of the Osun Osogbo Festival on southwestern Nigeria. A pre-tested, structured questionnaire was designed and administered to 50 local residents living close to the king’s palace (i.e. Ataoja’s palace) two months before the annual event. This was to test for the validity and reliability of the study and to have ideal of the sales before the festival. The quantitative method included administration of two sets of structured questionnaires. One set was prepared and administered to 200 festival attendees using a stratified random sampling technique.

Out of which 189 questionnaires were not mutilated and used for analysis. The second sets of questionnaires were administered to hoteliers and taxi drivers. Using [22] sampling technique to select 123 hoteliers out of 186 registered hotels in Osogbo township [24]. The sampling technique suggested that sample sizes are taking at 95% confidence level. Also, due to the nature of work of the taxi drivers, questionnaire was administered to (20) purposively selected taxi drivers at the terminus close to the location of the event. In-depth interview with the use of questionnaire guide was administered to stakeholders such as organizers and priests. The administration of questionnaire occurred on the grand finale of the event on 9<sup>th</sup> August, 2024. This was to obtain data on the demographic characteristics, festival experiences, and perceptions of the festival's socio-economic impacts during the festival.

Secondary data was gathered and reviewed through existing literature, reports, and statistics from relevant agencies which provided context and augment primary data. Data were analyzed using both descriptive (such as frequency tables, percentages, and charts) and inferential statistics (such as regression analysis to examine the relationships between variables. Thematic analysis was used for in-depth interview.

## 4 | Results and Discussion

### 4.1 | Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic Characteristics of the Osun Osogbo attendees. The percentage of male was (53.4%) and the female (46.6%). This indicated that both men and women were ably represented in the event. On the ages of the respondents, 25-34 years brackets formed (31.7%) of the total population. This shows that mid-ages respondents are also allowed to attend the festival. Meanwhile, ages 35- 54 years was (44.9%). This age brackets are those who are knowledgeable enough to give the significance of the festival.

They are also suitable for the study because such attendees within this age brackets are expected to have attained some level of stability in their homeland and which have resources for a returned trip back to their countries. Majority (67.2%) of the respondents were married and (71.4%) have at least secondary education. This indicated that the festival is for everyone and with or without educational background. About (84.7%) were business owners while (15.3%) were civil servant.

The respondent's homeland was represented with (70.3%) of the respondents were from Osun State and Nigeria indigenes while (29.7%) were of foreign indigene. This shows that the festival attracted both foreign and indigenous participants. Oyeweso et al. [23] asserted that people from oversea countries such as Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, etc. come to Osogbo township to celebrate Osun Osogbo ancestral heritage annually.

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the attendees.**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	101	53.4
Female	88	46.6
Age		
18- 24	25	13.2
25- 34	60	31.7
35- 44	40	21.1
45- 54	45	23.8
55-above	19	10.1
Marital status		
Single	62	32.8
Married	127	67.2
Educational background		
Non formal	34	18.0
Primary	20	10.6
Secondary	53	28.0
Tertiary	82	43.4
Occupation		
Trading	40	21.2
Civil Service	29	15.3
Business	51	27.0
Artisan	69	36.5
Homeland		
Osun State indigene	49	25.9
Nigeria indigene	84	44.4
Foreign indigene	56	29.6

## 4.2 | Responses of the attendees on the Socio-economic Impacts of Osun Osogbo Festival

Table 2 shows the responses of the attendees regarding the socio-economic impacts of Osun Osogbo festival. On the purchase of common commodity (91.0%) indicated the purchase of food, drinks, clothing, and local crafts. Other commodities that were commonly paid for were lodges (66.7%) and payment for transportation (71.5%). In other words, payment of these items invariably added to the economy of the local community. In line with the result [24], affirms that, ecotourism like Osun-Osogbo sacred grove and the annual festival contributed to the economic development to Nigeria's tourism and travel industry including the host community. There are the large number of local and international attendees annually that have to pay for essential commodities during the visit.

On the social impact of the study, (67.2%) agreed that community engagement was enhanced, cultural appreciation (95.3%) and historical significance (86.3%). It was indicated also that, environmental awareness, especially it boosts sustainable tourism (89.4%), biodiversity conservation (95.3%), cultural ecosystem services (91.0%).

The health benefit/ therapeutic believe (93.6%) was indicated by majority of the respondents. Majority of the attendees believed that the Osun River has healing power and this was one of the reasons that make people attend this festival. It reflects the spiritual and therapeutic aspects of the Osun goddess's influence on wellness, fruitfulness, and societal harmony. This concurred with [9], that Osun Osogbo Festival serves as a sacred haven and a revered pilgrimage location for different people, who travel to seek solace, guidance, and solutions to their life's challenges.

**Table 2. Perspectives of attendees on the impacts of Osun Osogbo festival.**

Variable	SA	A	D	SD
Purchase of commodity such as food, drinks, clothing, local craft	91.0	-	4.2	5.8
Booking of lodges	55.6	11.1	21.7	11.6
Paying for transportation	51.9	19.6	23.3	5.3
Social/Community engagement	67.2	21.7	5.3	5.8
Cultural appreciation	81.0	14.3	2.6	2.1
Historical significance	77.8	8.5	10.1	5.8
Environmental awareness				
Sustainable tourism development	59.8	29.6	5.8	4.8
Biodiversity conservation	79.4	15.9	3.7	1.1
Cultural ecosystem services	85.2	5.8	2.6	6.9
Health benefits				
Therapeutic healing	88.8	4.8	6.8	-

## 5 | Inferential Analysis

Table 3 shows the results of the regression analysis on the increased sales and community engagement. It shows that the respondents experienced increased income during the festival. Also, the p-value of 0.05 indicated there is a significant relationship between community engagement and cultural appreciation. This invariably indicated that community engagement and cultural appreciation were positively impacted in the study area.

**Table 3. Regression analysis.**

Predictor Variable	Outcome Variable	Coefficient	p-value
Increased sales	Common commodity purchase	0.40	0.01
Community engagement	Cultural appreciation	0.45	0.05

## 5.1 | Result of the Respective of the Business Owners (Hoteliers)

Table 4 shows the responses of the hoteliers on the impacts of Osun Osogbo festival. On the economic impact derived during the festival, (85%) of the respondents were of the perspectives of increases in daily income, (50%) increase in the number of staff and (90%) indicated change of operating hours. The result was in line with [23] that Osun Osogbo annual festival boosts economy. This concurred with [25], that tourism enhanced employment opportunities for more than 235 million people throughout the world. Local creativity and innovation (63.3%) at the festive period also indicated economic impacts to the local people. This means that the businesses and patronage increased with the increase in the number of people at that particular time.

The study also revealed that Osun tradition and culture (71.7%) were promoted. According to [26], Osun Osogbo Festival is about the grove's spiritual, political, and religio-cultural essence of people of Yorubaland. It was further revealed that Osun Osogbo festival project the image of the State positively (81.6%). The respondents (60.0%) also agreed that there existed mutual understanding between the attendees and the indigene. About (81.7%) of the respondents were of the opinion that the festival leads to the improvement of cultural exchange.

On the environmental impacts, (83.4%) were of the opinion that historical sites and monuments were restored, (46.6%) of the improvement of aesthetics, and (75%) for creation of awareness and preservation of the environment. The result was in line with [27], that the event brings improvement in aesthetic design of the environment.

**Table 4. Hoteliers perspectives during the Osun Osogbo festival.**

Variable	SA %	A %	D %	SD %
Economic impact				
Increase in daily income	65.0	20.3	6.5	8.1
Increase in number of staff	50.0	35.0	3.3	14.7
Change in operating hours	68.3	21.7	8.3	1.67
Enhancement and sales of local creativity and innovation	35.0	28.3	20.0	16.7
Increases in new businesses	41.6	25.0	11.7	21.7
Social impact				
Promotion of Osun tradition and culture	30.0	41.7	3.30	25.0
Projection of positive image of the city	60.0	21.6	3.30	15.0
Promotion of mutual understanding between the attendees and the indigene	20.0	40.0	30.0	10.0
Improvement of positive cultural exchange	61.7	20.0	6.6	11.7
Environmental impact				
Restoration of historical sites and monuments	51.7	31.7	8.3	8.3
Improvement of the aesthetic nature of the city	18.3	28.3	48.3	5.0
Creation of awareness of environmental preservation & conservation	31.7	43.3	25.0	-

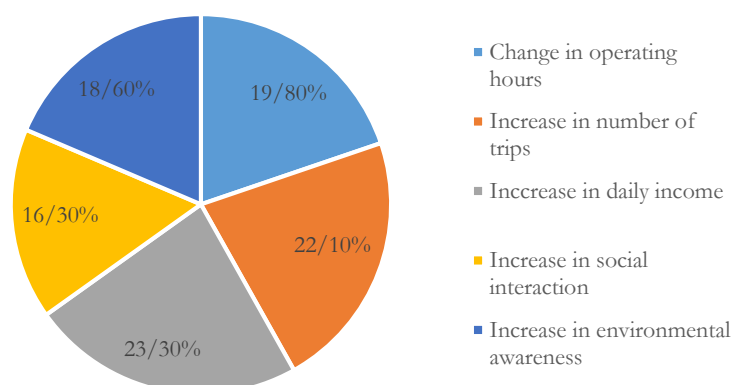
Note: SA means strongly agreed, A: means agreed, D: means disagreed, SD: means strongly disagreed.

## 5.2 | Perspectives of the Taxi Drivers on the Socio-Economic Contributions of Osun Osogbo Festival

Fig. 1 represents the perspective of the taxi drivers on the socio-economic contributions of Osun Osogbo festival. On the economic contributions, the result shows that (19.8%) of the respondents agreed to have change in operating hours, that is, the hours of working increased because of high patronage, increase in number of trip (22.1%), and (23.3%) increase in daily income. This result concurred with [28], that Osun Osogbo festival have significant economic benefits on the people and the communities around in the form of income, employment and local craft appreciation.

On the social impacts to the people and the communities at large, (16.3%) agreed on increased social interaction and (18.6%) on the environmental awareness. The finding of [29], supported the result of this study that the annual Osun Osogbo festival impacted tremendously on the socio-cultural aspects of the city of Osogbo. Evidence of the city's thriving entrepreneurial scene was on display as local artisans, including

artists, fabric makers, painters, and craftspeople, exhibited their handmade goods and artifacts for sale, therefore, highlighting the diversity and creativity of the community's cottage industries.



**Fig. 2. Perspective of the taxi drivers on the socio-economic contributions of Osun Osogbo festival.**

## 6 | Thematic Analysis

Qualitative data revealed that stakeholders, including organizers and site priests, perceived the Osun Osogbo festival as a notable cultural and ecological event. This annual celebration attracts attendees from different locations, preserves and promotes cultural heritage, and fosters social cohesion and community development. Moreover, stakeholders emphasized that the festival contributes substantially to the local economy through job creation and income generation.

The influx of visitors stimulates demand for local products, including food, drinks, and handicrafts. Some arrive early and patronize local hotels, therefore, further boosting economic activity. Stakeholders also ascertained that this festival boost decision making for future purposes. This concurred with [30] that, it leads to quantifying the monetary worth of environmental goods and services. Thereby, leading to evaluation of commercial products and facilitation of informed decision-making. The stakeholder mentioned that many attendees seek spiritual guidance from the site priest, and also collect river water for healing.

### 6.1 | Insights for Sustainable Tourism Development

The Osun Osogbo festival offers a unique opportunity for sustainable tourism development in Southwestern Nigeria. To achieve this, the following strategies are suggested:

#### Economic benefits

- I. Diversify revenue streams: the festival can generate revenue through ticket sales, accommodations, food, and local crafts. To achieve this, individuals, corporate organizations, and governments (local, state, and federal) should provide accommodations near the festival site, generating revenue and creating job opportunities.
- II. Support local entrepreneurship: local businesses, such as tie and dye, hand fan, and local mat makers, should receive support from banks and organizations to provide services and products to tourists, promoting economic growth and community development.
- III. Invest in infrastructure: upgrade infrastructure, such as roads, toilets, rest places, relaxation centers, and transportation, to enhance the tourist experience and support local economic development.



### **Socio-cultural benefits**

- I. Cultural preservation: the festival promotes cultural heritage and traditions, supporting the preservation of Yoruba culture and identity.
- II. Community engagement: encourage local community participation in the festival to foster a sense of ownership and pride in their cultural heritage.
- III. Intercultural exchange: promote cross-cultural understanding and appreciation between local communities and tourists through cultural exchange programs.

### **Environmental benefits**

- I. Environmental conservation: implement sustainable practices, such as waste management and energy-efficient systems, to minimize the festival's environmental impact.
- II. Protect sacred sites: preserve the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and prevent illegal activities, such as deforestation and wildlife poaching, to protect the site for future generations.
- III. Promote eco-tourism: encourage eco-tourism practices, such as birdwatching, hiking, and wildlife conservation, to create environmental awareness and appreciation.

### **Policy and governance**

- I. Develop sustainable tourism policies: establish policies and regulations that promote sustainable tourism development, such as waste management and environmental conservation.
- II. Strengthen community involvement: involve local communities in decision-making processes related to tourism development to promote community-led initiatives.
- III. Enhance collaboration and partnerships: foster partnerships between government agencies, local communities, and private sector stakeholders to promote sustainable tourism development.

### **Future research directions**

- I. Assess the festival's economic impact: conduct a comprehensive economic impact assessment to quantify the festival's contributions to local and regional economies.
- II. Evaluate the festival's environmental sustainability: conduct an environmental sustainability assessment to identify areas for improvement and promote eco-friendly practices.
- III. Explore the festival's cultural significance: conduct ethnographic research to explore the cultural significance of the Osun Osogbo Festival and its role in promoting Yoruba cultural heritage.

## **7 | Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Osun Osogbo annual festival is a vital socio-economic catalyst that contributes significantly to the local economy and community. Through its rich cultural heritage, the festival attracts tourists, generates revenue, and creates employment opportunities, thereby stimulating economic growth and development. The festival's impact extends beyond economic benefits, as it also fosters social cohesion, cultural exchange, and community engagement.

The preservation and promotion of Yoruba cultural heritage are essential aspects of the festival, ensuring the continuation of traditional practices and values. Ultimately, the Osun Osogbo annual festival serves as a model for sustainable tourism development, demonstrating the potential for cultural events to drive local economic growth, promote cultural preservation, and enhance community well-being. As such, efforts should be made to support and sustain this festival, ensuring its continued contribution to the socio-economic development of the local community.

To further boost the local economy, it is recommended that more attractions and amenities (hotels, eateries, site-seeing experiences) be established. Government to provide financial support to local indigenous people

to set up businesses. Incorporation of more traditional music, dance, and art performances to foster social interaction among attendees should be encouraged. All these would enhance the festival experience, create a thriving business environment, and ensure the long-term sustainability of the Osun Osogbo festival.

## Conflict of Interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Data Availability

All data are included in the text.

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