

PHILOSOPHY AND WESTERN THOUGHT: COMPARATIVE APPROACHES TO EPISTEMOLOGY AND ETHICS

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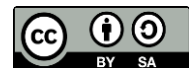
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Abstract

This study explores the comparative approaches to epistemology and ethics within Islamic philosophy and Western thought. Despite centuries of intellectual exchange, the two traditions are often studied in isolation, with minimal attention given to their intersections. Islamic philosophy emphasizes the integration of divine revelation and reason in acquiring knowledge, whereas Western thought traditionally prioritizes empirical evidence and rationalism. In ethics, both traditions share concerns regarding virtue and moral conduct but diverge in their foundations, with Islam grounding ethics in divine will and Western thought emphasizing human reason. The objective of this research is to compare these philosophical traditions, identifying both their points of convergence and divergence in epistemology and ethics. A qualitative research design is employed, focusing on textual analysis of key philosophical works from both traditions, including those of Avicenna, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Mill. The findings reveal significant differences in how each tradition understands the nature of knowledge and morality, yet also highlight areas of overlap, particularly in virtue ethics. This study contributes to the broader discourse by promoting a comparative framework for understanding the similarities and differences between Islamic and Western thought. It concludes by emphasizing the potential for cross-traditional dialogue to enrich contemporary philosophical inquiry.

Keywords: Comparative Philosophy, Islamic Philosophy, Western Thought



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INTRODUCTION

The philosophical tradition of Islam has a rich history that spans over a millennium, with profound contributions to various fields such as metaphysics, ethics, logic, and epistemology. Islamic philosophy, deeply rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith, has long been intertwined with the intellectual legacies of Greek, Persian, and Indian traditions. The works of prominent philosophers such as Al-Farabi, Avicenna, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Rushd have shaped not only Islamic thought but have also had a profound influence on Western philosophical development (Aydın, 2025; Nasrin, 2023). Western philosophy, originating from ancient Greece with thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates, also developed its own distinct paths of inquiry, particularly in the fields of epistemology and ethics. While Islamic and Western philosophies have their unique trajectories, their encounters over the centuries have led to fascinating intersections, particularly in their approaches to knowledge, truth, and moral conduct. Understanding these intersections is crucial, as it sheds light on the broader intellectual exchanges between two of the world's most influential philosophical traditions (Kenny, 2023; Young, 2023).

Islamic epistemology emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge through both reason and revelation. In contrast, Western epistemology traditionally favors empirical evidence and rationalist principles. This comparative approach, focusing on the similarities and differences in how both traditions approach the concept of knowledge, is essential to understanding their respective worldviews. Similarly, ethical thought in Islamic philosophy is shaped by divine commandments and the pursuit of moral virtue as guided by Islamic law (Sharia) (Haq, 2023; Polat, 2025). On the other hand, Western ethical frameworks have often been grounded in humanistic and secular foundations, with thinkers like Kant and Bentham contributing to the development of deontological and utilitarian theories. The tension between these two ethical paradigms one theocentric and the other anthropocentric raises important questions about the nature of morality and its application in diverse cultural and philosophical contexts. The need for a comparative analysis of Islamic philosophy and Western thought in epistemology and ethics becomes apparent, as it can provide deeper insights into the universality and particularity of moral and epistemic values (Aydın, 2025; Meyzaud, 2024).

This research seeks to address the comparative dimensions of Islamic philosophy and Western thought, focusing specifically on their approaches to epistemology and ethics. The core problem that this study tackles is the challenge of reconciling or contrasting these two systems of thought, which, while both robust, are often seen as diametrically opposed. The research aims to examine how Islamic philosophy and Western philosophy approach the acquisition of knowledge whether through divine revelation, sensory experience, or rational deduction and how these differing epistemological foundations influence ethical reasoning within each tradition (Ayatollahy, 2023; Badarussyamsi, 2023). The study also investigates how the two traditions view the nature of morality, justice, and the good life. By focusing on these core areas of epistemology and ethics, the research intends to provide a nuanced understanding of how these two philosophical systems can inform one another and, potentially, offer a more comprehensive perspective on knowledge and morality in a globalized world (Cai, 2025; Muslih, 2024).

Despite a wealth of scholarship on both Islamic philosophy and Western thought, there remains a significant gap in the literature when it comes to a thorough comparative study of

their approaches to epistemology and ethics. Most existing research tends to treat these philosophical traditions in isolation, with minimal attention to their intersections or points of divergence. While some scholars have explored the influence of Greek philosophy on early Islamic thought, and others have examined the reception of Islamic ideas in the West, there is still a lack of comprehensive studies that compare these systems on their own terms, particularly in the areas of epistemology and ethics. The existing literature often fails to adequately address how these two traditions can be understood as part of a larger global philosophical discourse. This gap highlights the need for a study that not only compares Islamic and Western thought but also contextualizes these comparisons within the contemporary intellectual climate, where debates about the universality of knowledge and ethics are becoming increasingly important (Alexandrov, 2025; Korkmazgöz, 2023).

This research is novel in that it seeks to fill this gap by providing a comparative analysis that specifically focuses on the epistemological and ethical frameworks within both Islamic philosophy and Western thought. The study draws on both classical and contemporary sources to examine how these traditions conceptualize knowledge, truth, and morality (Kaihoul, 2024; Saruhan, 2025). By engaging with key texts and scholars from both traditions, the research provides a fresh perspective that transcends traditional paradigms of East-West comparison. Furthermore, this study is timely and relevant, as the increasing interconnectedness of the world's cultures necessitates a more profound understanding of how different intellectual traditions contribute to the global dialogue on knowledge and ethics. The novelty of this research lies not only in its comparative approach but also in its emphasis on the practical implications of these philosophical systems for contemporary issues, such as global ethics, interfaith dialogue, and the role of reason in moral decision-making (Reinert, 2023; Rouhani, 2023).

The importance of this research cannot be overstated. In a world that is increasingly interconnected yet still marked by cultural and intellectual divisions, understanding the philosophical underpinnings of different traditions is vital for fostering dialogue and mutual respect. This research's focus on epistemology and ethics two fundamental areas of philosophy provides a valuable opportunity to explore how Islamic and Western philosophies can inform and challenge each other. By comparing these traditions, the study aims to contribute not only to the academic discourse but also to the broader conversations about global ethics, the role of religion in public life, and the ways in which philosophical traditions shape our understanding of the world and our place within it (Mammadov, 2025; Mezhuev, 2024a).

RESEARCH METHOD

The research design adopted for this study is a qualitative comparative analysis, aiming to explore the epistemological and ethical frameworks within Islamic philosophy and Western thought. This design is selected for its ability to provide a deeper understanding of the philosophical constructs within each tradition, allowing for a nuanced exploration of their similarities, differences, and intersections. The focus is on analyzing primary philosophical texts and theoretical constructs, drawing from both classical and contemporary works. The study compares key ideas, such as the nature of knowledge, the sources of truth, and the moral foundations in both traditions. A qualitative approach is appropriate as it enables an in-depth examination of the underlying assumptions, methodologies, and principles of Islamic and

Western philosophies, while facilitating an exploration of the broader historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts in which these philosophies have developed (Coomaraswamy, 2024; Holliday, 2025a).

The population for this study consists of major Islamic and Western philosophical texts, as well as scholars who have contributed significantly to the respective fields of epistemology and ethics. The sample is purposively selected, focusing on prominent works from both traditions. From the Islamic philosophy side, key figures such as Al-Farabi, Avicenna, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Rushd are examined, with a focus on their theories of knowledge and morality. Similarly, from Western philosophy, major thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill are included in the study. These philosophers are selected because their contributions have had lasting impacts on both epistemology and ethics in their respective traditions. The sample also includes contemporary scholars who have engaged in comparative studies or discussions about the intersections between Islamic and Western thought, providing a modern perspective on the ongoing relevance of these ideas (Demir, 2023; Nassimov, 2025).

The instruments for this research include textual analysis and thematic coding. Textual analysis involves a close reading of primary philosophical texts, allowing for the identification of key themes, concepts, and arguments related to epistemology and ethics. The texts are carefully examined for their treatment of knowledge acquisition, the nature of truth, and moral theories, which serve as the basis for comparison between the two traditions (Forte, 2025; Mezhuev, 2024b). Thematic coding is then used to categorize and interpret the different epistemological and ethical frameworks within these texts, enabling a systematic comparison. The study also incorporates secondary sources, such as journal articles and books, to provide additional context and scholarly perspectives on the comparative analysis. These instruments ensure that the study remains focused on the central research questions while drawing on a wide range of scholarly resources to enrich the analysis (Cruz, 2023a; Wolfe, 2024).

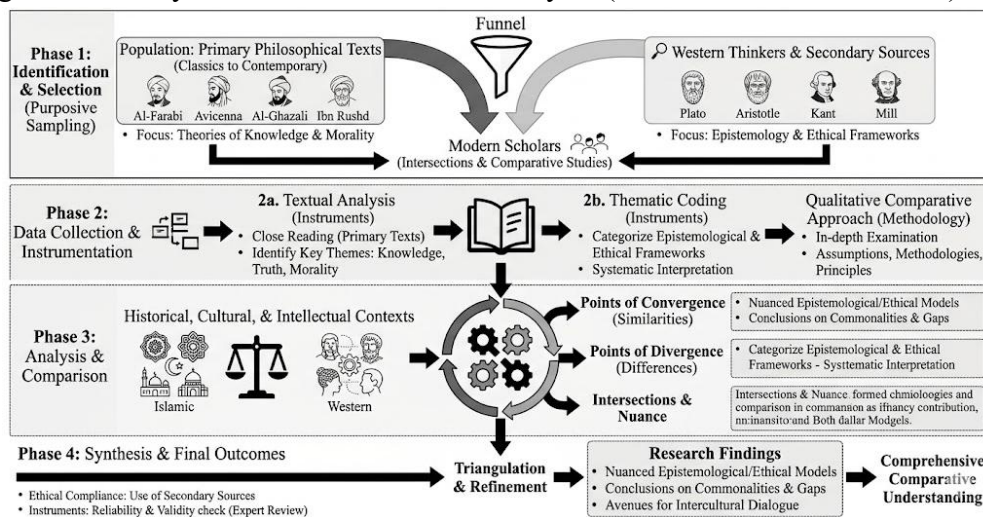


Figure 1. Procedures for conducting this research involve several key steps

The procedures for conducting this research involve several key steps. First, an extensive review of primary and secondary texts is conducted to identify relevant works from both Islamic and Western philosophy. This step includes the selection of texts based on their significance in the respective traditions and their direct relevance to the themes of

epistemology and ethics. Once the texts are selected, a detailed analysis is performed to extract key philosophical concepts and arguments. This analysis focuses on the treatment of knowledge, truth, and ethics, with particular attention given to the ways in which these concepts are presented and developed within each tradition. The comparative analysis is then carried out by systematically contrasting the epistemological and ethical theories of the selected philosophers, highlighting both points of convergence and divergence. Finally, the findings are synthesized to draw conclusions about the similarities, differences, and potential areas for further dialogue between Islamic and Western philosophical traditions. Throughout the research process, attention is paid to the historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts in which these philosophies emerged, ensuring a comprehensive and balanced analysis (Kenny, 2023; Meyzaud, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected in this study are primarily secondary, derived from an extensive review of classical and contemporary texts in both Islamic and Western philosophy. The study examines works from notable figures in each tradition, focusing on their epistemological and ethical theories. A key part of the data collection involves categorizing these theories according to central themes such as knowledge acquisition, sources of truth, and moral reasoning. The analysis also includes the classification of these theories into different epistemological and ethical categories. For example, Islamic philosophy often distinguishes between revealed knowledge (*ilm al-ghayb*) and empirical knowledge (*ilm al-ma'lum*), while Western thought frequently differentiates between rationalism, empiricism, and constructivism. The data is structured and presented in Table 1 below, which highlights key philosophers, their major contributions, and how their works compare in terms of epistemology and ethics.

Table 1. Comparison of Key Philosophers' Contributions to Epistemology and Ethics

Philosopher	Epistemology Focus	Ethical Framework Focus
Al-Farabi	Knowledge as a synthesis of reason and revelation	Virtue ethics, the ideal city-state
Avicenna	Rationalism, the role of the intellect in knowledge	Ethics based on divine will and human reason
Al-Ghazali	Skepticism about rationalism, emphasis on faith	The importance of inner purity and divine guidance in ethics
Ibn Rushd	Rationalism, knowledge through reason	Ethical philosophy rooted in Aristotelian principles
Plato	Theory of Forms, epistemology through reason	Virtue ethics, the ideal state
Aristotle	Empiricism, knowledge derived from sense experience	Ethics of virtue, the golden mean
Kant	Knowledge as a combination of empirical and a priori concepts	Deontological ethics, duty as a moral foundation
Mill	Empiricism, utilitarianism in the acquisition of knowledge	Utilitarian ethics, greatest good for the greatest number

This table demonstrates the broad scope of philosophical contributions from both traditions. In Islamic philosophy, knowledge is often understood in relation to divine

revelation, as seen in the works of Avicenna and Al-Ghazali, who emphasized the interdependence of reason and faith. Western thought, represented by figures such as Plato, Aristotle, and Kant, approaches knowledge as a rational process grounded either in empirical evidence or abstract reasoning. The comparison of these thinkers reveals how Islamic and Western epistemologies diverge in their treatment of knowledge and ethics. Islamic thought tends to place a stronger emphasis on the theological and spiritual dimensions of knowledge, while Western philosophy prioritizes the cognitive and empirical aspects. This distinction highlights the contrasting sources of authority in each tradition: divine revelation in Islam versus human reason in the West and their impact on ethical theories.

The analysis reveals that despite their differences, there are also areas of overlap. For instance, both Islamic and Western philosophers have explored virtue ethics, albeit with different emphases. In Islamic thought, ethics are deeply rooted in divine commandments, with an emphasis on individual spiritual development and adherence to Sharia. In contrast, Western philosophers like Aristotle and Kant emphasize the development of moral character through rational thought and the pursuit of the good life. The study further explores how these ethical frameworks converge in their ultimate aim: guiding individuals toward a virtuous life and a just society. Although the metaphysical underpinnings of ethics differ between the two traditions, the concern for human well-being and moral excellence serves as a common goal. This suggests a potential for cross-traditional learning and integration, especially in addressing contemporary moral dilemmas such as social justice, environmental ethics, and human rights (Jeshvaghani, 2021).

The relational aspect of this data shows how these philosophical frameworks interact with one another, especially in the contemporary context. Modern philosophers and scholars of comparative philosophy have recognized that both Islamic and Western philosophies can offer valuable insights into pressing global issues, particularly in the realms of epistemology and ethics. This comparative approach facilitates a dialogue between the two traditions, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of knowledge and morality in the modern world. For instance, when discussing epistemology, both traditions highlight the importance of intellectual humility. Islamic philosophers emphasize the limits of human reason in understanding divine truths, while Western philosophers like Kant argue that human knowledge is constrained by our cognitive faculties. In ethics, both traditions stress the importance of cultivating virtues that contribute to personal and societal well-being. This relational dynamic encourages the exploration of how Islamic and Western approaches can complement each other in shaping a more inclusive, holistic philosophical discourse.

The case study of the ethical frameworks of Avicenna and Aristotle provides a concrete example of how these two traditions approach moral reasoning. Avicenna's ethical system, grounded in the concept of divine guidance, places a strong emphasis on the role of reason in understanding moral truths. His ethics are informed by a Neoplatonic view of the soul, where virtue is seen as the realization of the soul's potential through both rational and divine insight. Aristotle's virtue ethics, on the other hand, focuses on achieving moral excellence through the development of good habits and the cultivation of practical wisdom (*phronesis*). By comparing these two thinkers, the study illustrates how both Islamic and Western ethical theories share a commitment to human flourishing but diverge in their sources of moral authority: divine will versus human reason. This case study demonstrates how a comparative approach can yield a

deeper understanding of the strengths and limitations of each tradition’s ethical framework (Holliday, 2025b; Khalfaoui, 2021).

In examining these data points, it becomes clear that both Islamic philosophy and Western thought offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on epistemology and ethics. The study underscores the need for a more integrated approach to philosophy, one that values the diverse contributions of both traditions. The interpretations of knowledge and ethics in each tradition reflect broader cultural and religious values that shape how individuals understand their place in the world and their moral responsibilities. By synthesizing these two philosophical systems, the study opens up new possibilities for cross-cultural dialogue and collaborative intellectual exploration. The comparative analysis not only enhances our understanding of each tradition but also provides a foundation for addressing contemporary global issues through a more inclusive and multifaceted philosophical lens.

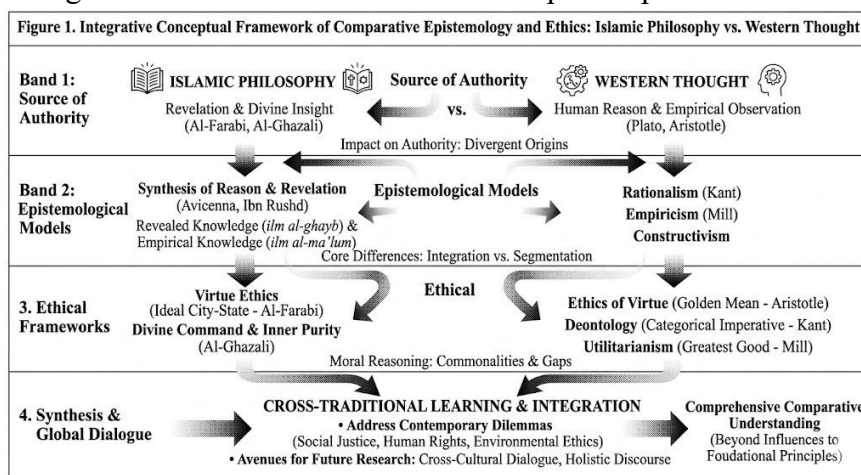


Figure 2. Conclusions of the Research Findings

This study presents a comparative analysis of epistemology and ethics within Islamic philosophy and Western thought, focusing on key philosophers and their approaches to knowledge and morality. The findings reveal distinct philosophical traditions, where Islamic philosophy emphasizes the integration of divine revelation and reason in understanding epistemology and ethics, while Western thought often favors a more empirical or rationalist approach. Key philosophers such as Avicenna, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Rushd illustrate the centrality of divine knowledge in Islam, while figures like Plato, Aristotle, and Kant represent the rational and empirical foundations of Western epistemology. Despite their differences, both traditions share common ethical concerns, including the development of virtuous character and the pursuit of human flourishing. These findings provide a framework for further exploration into how Islamic and Western philosophies intersect, complement, and contrast in their treatment of knowledge and ethics (Cruz, 2023b; Shahidullah, 2022).

The results of this research contrast with previous studies that have focused primarily on the influence of Islamic thought on Western philosophy or vice versa. While earlier works have often emphasized the historical transmission of ideas such as the transmission of Greek philosophy into the Islamic world or the impact of Islamic scholars on Western medieval thought this study goes beyond historical influence. It provides a comparative framework that not only highlights the intellectual exchanges between the two traditions but also critically examines how these philosophies diverge in their foundational principles. This comparison

offers a new lens through which to view the ongoing relevance of both traditions in contemporary philosophical discourse, particularly in areas such as ethics, epistemology, and global philosophical dialogue (Mavroudi, 2021; Piotrowski, 2021).

The results of this study suggest a need for deeper reflection on the ways in which these two philosophical traditions can contribute to a more holistic understanding of human knowledge and morality. The intersection of Islamic and Western thought challenges the binary opposition often drawn between Eastern and Western philosophies. Instead of viewing these traditions as mutually exclusive or oppositional, the findings invite a reevaluation of how they can inform and enrich one another. This comparative approach also underscores the importance of recognizing diverse epistemological and ethical systems in a globalized world. The study emphasizes that philosophical traditions, when examined on their own terms, offer valuable insights that can contribute to broader conversations on ethics, knowledge, and human development in diverse cultural contexts .

The implications of these findings are significant for contemporary philosophical discourse. By comparing Islamic and Western approaches to epistemology and ethics, this research offers a more inclusive framework for addressing pressing global challenges such as social justice, human rights, and environmental ethics. It encourages a more integrative approach to philosophical inquiry, one that recognizes the strengths and limitations of both traditions. Moreover, the study's findings challenge the dominance of Western-centric philosophical models by highlighting the richness and depth of Islamic philosophy. The cross-traditional dialogue promoted by this research can contribute to a more balanced understanding of global philosophical traditions, fostering mutual respect and intellectual collaboration in an increasingly interconnected world (Mokhtari, 2024).

The findings of this study are shaped by the historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts in which both Islamic and Western philosophies developed. Islamic thought, deeply rooted in theological traditions and the centrality of divine revelation, naturally places a higher emphasis on the relationship between faith and reason. In contrast, Western philosophy, influenced by the Greco-Roman intellectual tradition, has tended to prioritize empirical observation and human reason as the primary sources of knowledge. These contrasting sources of authority in each tradition divine revelation versus human reason help explain the differing approaches to epistemology and ethics found in the study. The study's comparative framework highlights how these philosophical systems have evolved and continue to shape modern debates about knowledge, truth, and morality in diverse contexts.

Given the insights gained from this research, future studies should focus on deepening the comparative analysis between Islamic and Western thought, particularly in relation to practical applications of ethics in contemporary society. Researchers could expand the investigation to include more diverse philosophical traditions, such as those from African, East Asian, and Indigenous cultures, to further enrich the global philosophical dialogue. Additionally, the study's findings suggest the need for interdisciplinary research that combines philosophy with fields like political science, environmental studies, and theology, to explore how these philosophical systems can inform real-world issues. As the world becomes more interconnected, the lessons drawn from this comparative analysis can guide future intellectual and cultural exchanges, promoting a more inclusive and multifaceted approach to the study of ethics and epistemology in the global context.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this research lies in the comparative analysis of epistemology and ethics within Islamic philosophy and Western thought. While prior studies have often explored these traditions in isolation or through the lens of historical influence, this study presents a unique comparative framework that highlights both the convergences and divergences between the two. It reveals that Islamic epistemology emphasizes the integration of divine revelation and reason, with a focus on the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of knowledge, whereas Western epistemology traditionally emphasizes empirical evidence and rationalism. Similarly, while both traditions share common ethical concerns, such as the cultivation of virtue, their moral reasoning diverges based on their respective foundations: divine will in Islam and human reason in Western thought. This comparison offers fresh insights into how these traditions engage with fundamental questions of knowledge and ethics in their own ways.

This research contributes to the field by introducing a novel comparative methodology that integrates both classical and contemporary sources. Rather than merely examining the historical impact of one tradition on the other, the study creates a space for an equitable comparison, evaluating both traditions on their own terms. The methodological approach combines textual analysis, thematic coding, and cross-traditional philosophical discourse, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding how Islamic and Western epistemologies and ethical systems can inform each other. By offering this new comparative lens, the research adds a valuable contribution to contemporary discussions in philosophy, particularly in how different intellectual traditions can be brought into dialogue to address global ethical and epistemological challenges.

Despite the insights provided, the research is not without its limitations. One major constraint is the focus on a select number of philosophers from both traditions, which limits the scope of comparison. Future research could benefit from a broader examination of lesser known Islamic and Western thinkers, as well as other global philosophical traditions. Additionally, while this study focuses on theoretical frameworks, it could be expanded to explore the practical implications of these philosophical approaches in modern society, such as their influence on policy, education, and global ethics. Further research could also delve deeper into specific areas, such as the intersection of Islamic and Western thought in the context of contemporary issues like human rights, environmental ethics, and intercultural dialogue, contributing to the development of more practical and interdisciplinary applications of these philosophical systems.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used Chat GPT to assist in improving grammar, language quality, and overall readability of the text. After using this tool, the author(s) carefully reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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