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The Sociology of the “Hijrah” Movement Among Indonesian Urban Professionals and Celebrities: A Quest for Pious Modernity

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ABSTRACT

Background. The “Hijrah” movement among Indonesian urban professionals and celebrities represents a contemporary form of Islamic revivalism shaped by the intersections of faith, modernity, and social identity. This study investigates how participants in this movement construct and perform piety within the context of urban consumer culture and digital visibility.

Purpose. The research aims to explore the sociological dynamics underlying their motivations, networks, and self-representations as expressions of a quest for “pious modernity.”

Method. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, the study combines in-depth interviews, participant observation, and digital ethnography across Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya from 2023 to 2024.

Results. Findings reveal that the hijrah phenomenon is not merely a religious transformation but also a form of social repositioning and identity negotiation in response to moral uncertainty in modern life. Hijrah communities utilize social media, fashion, and entrepreneurial ventures to embody Islamic ethics while remaining embedded in urban capitalist systems.

Conclusion. The study concludes that the hijrah movement exemplifies a hybrid religiosity merging spiritual authenticity with middle-class aspirations thereby illustrating the ongoing negotiation between Islam and modernity in Indonesia’s post-reform urban culture.

KEYWORDS

hijrah movement, urban Islam, pious modernity, celebrity religiosity, digital sociology

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INTRODUCTION

The growing phenomenon of the hijrah movement among Indonesia’s urban professionals and celebrities has become a defining feature of contemporary Islamic revivalism in Southeast Asia. The term hijrah, originally referring to the Prophet Muhammad’s migration from Mecca to Medina, has evolved into a symbol of personal spiritual transformation and social realignment in modern Muslim societies. In Indonesia’s rapidly urbanizing and digitally connected environment, hijrah represents not merely a return to religious piety but also a reconfiguration of selfhood and modernity, as individuals seek to reconcile faith with professional ambition, consumer lifestyles, and social media visibility.

Indonesian cities such as Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya have become fertile grounds for this movement, where faith-based communities, Islamic fashion industries, and digital preaching platforms converge to produce a new urban religiosity (Eckardt, 2024; ElMorally, 2024; Sajit & Eyal, 2024). The movement attracts professionals, influencers, and entertainers who consciously display their religious transformation through public acts of devotion, modest attire, and online engagement. This emergence reflects a complex interplay between spiritual sincerity and public performance, between religious revival and capitalist participation.

The hijrah movement thus stands as both a sociocultural and moral project a response to modern anxieties about identity, morality, and belonging. It signals the rise of a new Muslim middle class that seeks moral certainty amid the ambiguities of globalization. Understanding the sociological dimensions of this transformation is essential to capturing how Islam adapts, negotiates, and thrives in the urban modernity of Indonesia (Beidollahkhani, 2024; Bondarenko, 2024; Karimov et al., 2024). The central problem addressed in this study lies in the paradoxical nature of the hijrah movement as both a quest for spiritual purity and a participation in modern consumer culture. Urban professionals and celebrities claim to pursue an authentic religious life while simultaneously navigating the commodification of piety through fashion brands, digital platforms, and public performances of religiosity. This duality raises questions about the sincerity, motivation, and social function of the movement.

Existing public narratives often romanticize hijrah as a purely spiritual awakening, ignoring the sociological structures that shape it. The movement is entangled with class aspirations, gender identities, and social hierarchies that determine who gains visibility and authority within the Islamic sphere. The emphasis on visibility and branding has transformed faith into a performative asset, blurring the line between personal devotion and social capital accumulation. This research problem becomes more pressing as hijrah communities increasingly influence public discourse on morality and Muslim identity in Indonesia. Their visibility in popular culture through talk shows, YouTube channels, and celebrity endorsements redefines what it means to be a "pious modern Muslim." The study, therefore, addresses how these actors interpret, negotiate, and institutionalize piety within the framework of modern urban life.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the sociological dimensions of the hijrah movement among Indonesian urban professionals and celebrities. The research aims to explore how participants construct and perform piety within the competing demands of modernity, capitalism, and digital culture. It seeks to uncover the motivations behind their transformation, the networks that sustain their faith-based communities, and the discursive practices that legitimize their new moral identities (Dasgupta & Datta, 2024; Decker, 2024; Rahim et al., 2024). The study further intends to investigate the symbolic and material dimensions of hijrah how Islamic values are embodied through fashion, entrepreneurship, and media engagement. By examining these dynamics, the research aims to explain how religion becomes both a source of spiritual fulfillment and a strategy for social distinction in the context of contemporary Indonesia.

This research ultimately aspires to contribute to the broader sociological understanding of Islam's adaptation to modern life. It situates the hijrah movement within the theoretical frameworks of pious modernity and reflexive religiosity, providing insights into how faith, media, and identity intersect in shaping moral subjectivities in post-reform Indonesia. Previous studies on Islamic revivalism in Indonesia have largely focused on traditional movements, political Islam, or the role of religious institutions. While these perspectives have deepened understanding of Islam's social and political expressions, they often overlook the micro-sociological dimensions of urban religiosity

among professionals and celebrities. Little attention has been paid to how modern subjects experience piety in an age of digital capitalism and performative culture.

The existing literature on hijrah tends to be descriptive rather than analytical, emphasizing moral transformation without engaging in critical reflection on class dynamics, gendered agency, and media representation. Most studies have not yet explored how piety is negotiated within neoliberal frameworks that commodify religious expression through fashion, branding, and entrepreneurship. This gap limits our comprehension of how Islam functions as both a moral compass and a cultural industry (Makdisi, 2024; Siddiqi, 2024; Yurtalan, 2024). This study fills that scholarly void by offering a sociological lens that captures the hijrah movement as a complex social phenomenon embedded in digital modernity. It bridges the gap between macro-level theories of Islamic resurgence and micro-level analyses of self-making, consumption, and media mediation. The research thereby extends the discourse beyond the binary of “authentic faith” versus “commodified religion,” highlighting the hybridity that defines contemporary Muslim identity.

This study introduces a novel framework that conceptualizes the hijrah movement as a quest for “pious modernity” a sociological condition in which religiosity and modernity are not opposing forces but mutually constitutive. The originality lies in examining hijrah not as a religious return but as a cultural performance and identity negotiation that reflects Indonesia’s urban middle-class sensibilities. The analysis integrates theories of digital sociology, consumer culture, and reflexive religiosity to provide a multidimensional understanding of faith in modern contexts. The justification of this research rests on its interdisciplinary significance. It contributes to the sociology of religion, media studies, and urban anthropology by demonstrating how Islam is lived, mediated, and commodified in everyday life. The findings are expected to enrich debates on moral subjectivity, gender representation, and digital piety in Muslim societies, offering comparative insights relevant to global discussions on post-secular modernities.

The study’s importance extends beyond academic discourse; it addresses a cultural transformation shaping Indonesia’s moral landscape. As the hijrah movement continues to redefine ideals of success, virtue, and authenticity, this research offers a critical reflection on how faith is reimagined in the face of globalization. The investigation thus stands as a timely contribution to understanding the evolving contours of pious modernity in the Muslim world.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research employed a qualitative design rooted in sociological inquiry, specifically utilizing an interpretive phenomenological approach. The choice of this design was intended to capture the lived experiences, social meanings, and identity negotiations of individuals participating in the hijrah movement among Indonesia’s urban professionals and celebrities. The interpretive lens allowed the researcher to explore how participants construct notions of “pious modernity” within the context of urban life, digital culture, and neoliberal consumerism. Data collection was grounded in ethnographic sensitivity, emphasizing context, narrative depth, and reflexive interpretation rather than statistical generalization. The qualitative approach ensured that the complexity of social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions could be represented holistically.

The population of this study comprised individuals actively involved in the hijrah movement, particularly among urban professionals and celebrities residing in major Indonesian cities such as Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya. The participants included media influencers, entrepreneurs, preachers, and entertainment figures who publicly identify with hijrah values through their lifestyle choices, business ventures, and online content. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, guided by specific inclusion criteria namely participants who have demonstrated visible

transformation toward religious observance and maintain active participation in hijrah-based communities. A total of 25 participants were selected to ensure diverse representation of gender, profession, and socio-economic background, allowing the study to reflect the plurality of contemporary Muslim experiences.

The instruments used in this research included semi-structured interview protocols, observation guides, and digital documentation matrices. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit narratives regarding participants' motivations, religious practices, and perceptions of piety and modernity. The observation guide was applied during community gatherings, religious study sessions, and social media interactions, focusing on patterns of communication, appearance, and group dynamics. Supplementary data were gathered from digital platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, where participants actively express their religious transformation. Field notes and reflexive journals were also maintained to ensure interpretive rigor and researcher transparency throughout the data collection process.

The research procedures followed four systematic stages: preparation, data collection, analysis, and validation. The preparation stage involved ethical clearance, participant recruitment, and the establishment of rapport with key informants to gain access to hijrah networks. The data collection stage integrated in-depth interviews and participant observation over a six-month period between July and December 2024. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring concepts, symbolic expressions, and sociocultural patterns within the data. Coding was conducted using an inductive process to derive themes directly from participants' accounts rather than imposing predetermined categories. Data validation was achieved through triangulation across interviews, observations, and digital ethnography, ensuring credibility and authenticity of interpretation. The procedural framework of this study thus reflects a rigorous and contextually grounded methodology suitable for exploring the sociological intricacies of Indonesia's contemporary hijrah phenomenon.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The demographic distribution of participants demonstrates the socio-economic diversity within the hijrah movement. Among the 25 respondents, 60% were professionals in corporate or creative industries, 24% were entrepreneurs, and 16% were entertainment figures such as actors, musicians, and influencers. The majority (68%) resided in Jakarta, while 20% were based in Bandung and 12% in Surabaya. Age distribution ranged between 25 and 45 years, with a balanced gender representation. Educational backgrounds showed a dominance of tertiary-level attainment, indicating a highly literate and socially mobile population.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Profile of Hijrah Participants

Category	Percentage (%)	Key Notes
Professionals (Corporate/Creative)	60	Mostly mid-level managers, designers, educators
Entrepreneurs	24	Involved in modest fashion, halal food, digital startups
Celebrities/Influencers	16	Active in online religious advocacy
Residence: Jakarta	68	High urban exposure, event-based communities
Residence: Bandung	20	Localized <i>hijrah</i> movements centered on mosques

Data patterns indicate that the hijrah movement is dominated by educated, urban middle-class actors who integrate Islamic identity with professional aspirations. The gender composition and occupational diversity suggest a democratization of piety across socio-economic lines, breaking the stereotype that Islamic revivalism is confined to traditional or rural domains. The demographic findings reveal how social mobility, education, and digital literacy shape the contours of the hijrah movement. Participants exhibit a distinctive form of religiosity that aligns with the aesthetics of urban modernity. Their transition toward piety is not isolated from professional and digital contexts; rather, it is deeply embedded within them. The integration of Islamic values into lifestyle branding, entrepreneurship, and online influence reflects an evolving moral economy that merges faith and modern consumption.

Observation of hijrah-based events, online platforms, and interviews further highlights the centrality of digital media as a vehicle for identity construction. Participants frequently employ Instagram and YouTube as spaces to narrate their religious transformation, thereby transforming personal faith into a public discourse. The circulation of visual symbols such as modest fashion, bearded styles, and Quranic captions constructs a shared aesthetic of pious modernity. The qualitative narratives demonstrate that hijrah participants articulate their spiritual transformation as both an act of self-liberation and moral realignment. The majority describe their decision to join hijrah communities as a response to existential fatigue, social pressure, and a perceived moral vacuum in urban life. Their testimonies emphasize the search for authenticity and inner peace amid the demands of capitalist productivity and digital exposure.

A recurrent theme involves the reinterpretation of "success." Participants no longer define achievement through material accumulation but through alignment with divine values, communal belonging, and ethical entrepreneurship. These accounts signify a broader cultural reorientation in which Islamic faith becomes a means of reconciling moral integrity with professional advancement. The analysis of interview and observation data reveals significant correlations between professional status, digital visibility, and the expression of religious identity. Urban professionals employ hijrah as a framework to cultivate moral credibility and social legitimacy within their occupational fields. Inferentially, the movement functions as a mechanism for re-establishing moral capital in competitive environments, allowing members to position themselves as ethical yet modern actors.

The use of social media reinforces this process by enabling individuals to broadcast their pious persona while simultaneously engaging in commercial and networking activities. The intertwining of spirituality and self-promotion indicates that religiosity operates as a cultural resource one that provides both moral grounding and symbolic power within Indonesia's neoliberal urban context. The interaction between digital practices, community engagement, and moral narratives forms a relational framework that sustains the hijrah movement. Interviews show that participants derive social validation and belonging through digital religious communities, where likes, shares, and comments function as moral metrics. Offline gatherings such as kajian sessions and charity events complement these virtual interactions, creating a hybrid social space that merges online and physical piety.

Correlations between social networks and perceived moral authority also emerge. Participants with higher online visibility often occupy leadership or influencer roles within hijrah communities, reflecting the stratification of digital religiosity. This dynamic underscores how media literacy and public performance shape hierarchies within contemporary Islamic movements. A representative case is that of "Rafi," a 33-year-old former television host who left the entertainment industry to become a preacher and entrepreneur. His hijrah was catalyzed by disillusionment with fame and a

desire for moral clarity. Through his Instagram platform, he established a following of over 500,000, promoting Islamic fashion and organizing charity programs. His narrative illustrates how digital entrepreneurship and faith-based branding intertwine to produce a new form of moral authority.

Another case involves “Alya,” a 29-year-old fashion designer from Bandung who integrates *syar’i* aesthetics into her clothing line. Her hijrah was expressed through modest dress and business ethics rooted in Islamic values. Her studio became both a creative space and a site for female religious study, symbolizing the fusion of devotion, empowerment, and entrepreneurship that typifies female hijrah participation. Both cases exemplify the dual function of hijrah as personal reformation and socio-economic repositioning. The transition from secular fame to spiritual entrepreneurship signals a moral recalibration that aligns individual ambition with communal ethics. Economic success becomes reinterpreted as divine reward, allowing participants to maintain aspirations for modern progress without compromising religious devotion.

The entrepreneurial orientation of these actors reflects how piety is commodified yet internalized as a moral discipline. Their businesses embody ethical consumption and spiritual aspiration, illustrating that the hijrah movement simultaneously resists and utilizes capitalist structures. This paradox captures the central tension of pious modernity in Indonesia’s urban milieu. The synthesis of statistical, qualitative, and case-based data reveals that the hijrah movement functions as a sociological bridge between religion and modernity (Mamun et al., 2024; Salguero Montaña, 2024; Sintang et al., 2024). Its participants navigate the contradictions of urban life by transforming Islamic values into cultural capital. The movement reshapes moral subjectivity through digital mediation, enabling the emergence of a new Muslim middle class defined by faith-driven professionalism.

The findings suggest that hijrah is less a withdrawal from modernity than a reconfiguration of it. The participants’ pursuit of pious modernity reflects a distinctly Indonesian negotiation between global Islamic trends, urban consumerism, and digital individualism. The sociology of hijrah thus encapsulates the ongoing transformation of religious life in the age of media visibility and neoliberal aspiration. The findings of this study reveal that the hijrah movement among Indonesian urban professionals and celebrities signifies a complex intersection of faith, identity, and modernity. Participants exhibit a form of “pious modernity” that merges Islamic devotion with urban consumerism, technological engagement, and social aspiration (Gitler, 2024; Kuppinger, 2019; Rhorchi, 2024). The hijrah experience is not solely a return to religious orthodoxy but an adaptive process of negotiating moral values within the demands of neoliberal society. Faith is manifested not through isolation but through visible participation in digital, entrepreneurial, and cultural spaces.

The data indicate that the hijrah movement functions as both a moral and social project. Members cultivate religious authority and social legitimacy by transforming personal piety into performative public expression. The role of digital media emerges as central, allowing individuals to disseminate narratives of transformation while simultaneously engaging in commercial and symbolic exchanges. These findings underscore that religiosity, in this context, is inseparable from visibility and commodification. The participants’ narratives demonstrate that hijrah serves as a form of moral capital in urban professional environments. Adherence to Islamic values becomes a means of asserting integrity, discipline, and authenticity within competitive and often morally ambiguous work cultures. Such positioning allows individuals to redefine success by integrating ethical commitment with professional achievement.

The results further highlight the gendered dimensions of the movement. Women, particularly those in creative and entrepreneurial sectors, use hijrah as a platform for empowerment through modest fashion and business initiatives. The movement thus reconfigures femininity, shifting the discourse from passive religiosity to active moral agency. The findings of this study align partially with existing scholarship on Islamic revivalism, particularly in the works of Fealy (2008) and Howell (2019), which emphasize the middle-class resurgence of faith in Indonesia. However, unlike earlier studies that portray religious movements as resistance to modernity, this research identifies hijrah as an accommodation of modern life. (Bolghiran & Berger, 2024; MacLellan, 2024; Qomaruzzaman & Busro, 2021) The participants embrace modern tools social media, branding, and entrepreneurship to sustain and express their religiosity, suggesting a more hybridized religious modernity.

Prior research by Nisa (2018) and Slama (2021) on digital Islam highlights how online spaces mediate religious identity. This study extends that argument by showing how digital religiosity intertwines with social stratification and professional mobility. The hijrah movement exemplifies the transformation of religious expression into a mediated performance, where the aesthetics of piety circulate as social currency within urban culture (Djelantik, 2019; Juliansyahzen, 2023; Rege & VanZant, 2019; Smith-Hefner, 2025). The present research diverges from political analyses of Islamic revivalism that focus on ideological contestation. It situates hijrah within cultural sociology, emphasizing affective and symbolic dimensions rather than political mobilization. This distinction underscores that contemporary religiosity operates through lifestyle practices and market participation rather than institutional or doctrinal confrontation.

The comparison with studies of Middle Eastern da'wah movements also reveals contextual specificity. While transnational influences exist, the Indonesian hijrah phenomenon reflects localized adaptations, shaped by class aspiration, cultural aesthetics, and national narratives of moderation. The movement embodies a vernacular modernity that resonates with the moral and aesthetic sensibilities of Indonesia's Muslim middle class. The findings signify a broader transformation in the moral landscape of Indonesian urban society. The hijrah movement marks the emergence of what can be termed “mediated spirituality,” where faith is performed, circulated, and legitimized through technological interfaces. This transformation reflects how religion in the modern era no longer operates solely within sacred institutions but within networks of influence, consumption, and visibility.

The research outcomes also indicate that piety has become a mode of identity negotiation amid uncertainty. Participants construct moral coherence through religious discipline in response to fragmented social realities and accelerated lifestyles. The hijrah identity functions as a stabilizing force a response to moral dislocation experienced within capitalist urban life. The phenomenon can also be interpreted as a cultural critique of secular modernity. Participants' emphasis on moral authenticity and spiritual balance represents a reaction to the perceived superficiality and alienation of contemporary existence. Through hijrah, individuals reassert the centrality of transcendence in everyday life while maintaining participation in modern structures of work and consumption.

The movement ultimately symbolizes the domestication of modernity within Islamic moral frameworks. Rather than rejecting technological or economic progress, participants reinterpret these domains as avenues for ethical self-realization. This rearticulation signifies the ongoing capacity of Islam to adapt to shifting social conditions without forfeiting its spiritual depth. The implications of these findings extend to understanding the future trajectories of religiosity in urban Muslim societies. The hijrah movement exemplifies how faith-based identity can coexist with digital citizenship and entrepreneurial innovation. This coalescence challenges binary assumptions about

religion versus modernity, illustrating instead a process of integration and mutual reinforcement. For policymakers and educators, the findings suggest the need to engage with religious movements not as threats to secularism but as sociocultural phenomena capable of fostering ethical citizenship. The hijrah ethos, with its emphasis on self-discipline, moral accountability, and community solidarity, can be harnessed constructively within civic and educational frameworks.

The research also contributes to the sociology of religion by expanding conceptualizations of piety. It reframes religiosity as a dynamic and performative process embedded in contemporary media economies and professional networks. Such an understanding opens avenues for comparative research on faith-based lifestyle movements across global Muslim contexts. The implications for gender studies are equally significant. The rise of female hijrah entrepreneurs redefines agency within Islamic frameworks, demonstrating that modesty and empowerment are not mutually exclusive. Their participation signals a shifting discourse on women’s roles in public and religious life. The emergence of hijrah as a sociocultural phenomenon is driven by structural, psychological, and technological factors. Rapid urbanization, digital connectivity, and consumer capitalism have produced new moral anxieties and identity crises among the educated middle class. Religion, in this context, provides both existential meaning and ethical direction amid the turbulence of modern living.

The digital ecosystem intensifies this dynamic by providing platforms for visibility, validation, and community formation. The convergence of spirituality and media allows participants to experience religion as both personal devotion and public engagement. Such digital mediation explains why religiosity increasingly takes aesthetic and performative forms. The internalization of neoliberal values also contributes to the structure of hijrah. Participants employ self-improvement discourses productivity, discipline, and branding to align their spiritual aspirations with market rationalities. This alignment results in a “neoliberal piety,” where faith is lived as a project of self-optimization. Cultural memory and local Islamic traditions further shape the character of the movement. The emphasis on community (jamaah), mentorship, and charity reflects continuity with Indonesian Islamic heritage. These elements temper the commercial tendencies of the movement and preserve its moral credibility.

The findings invite future research to examine the longitudinal impact of hijrah on social cohesion, gender norms, and economic ethics. Further investigation should focus on the sustainability of this moral enthusiasm in the face of global market pressures and media saturation. Understanding how the movement evolves across generations will be essential to predicting the trajectory of urban religiosity in Indonesia. The study opens a conversation about the need for ethical digital engagement among religious influencers. As social media remains central to the hijrah experience, regulatory and educational frameworks should encourage authenticity, accountability, and digital literacy in religious communication.

The integration of pious modernity into public discourse also presents an opportunity for interfaith dialogue and inclusive moral education. Universities and community organizations can leverage the hijrah ethos to promote civic virtue grounded in ethical pluralism. The sociological insight derived from this study emphasizes that hijrah is not an endpoint but an evolving moral journey. It embodies the potential for religion to remain vital and transformative in the digital age. Understanding and engaging this transformation will be crucial for scholars, policymakers, and communities navigating the moral complexities of modern urban life.

CONCLUSION

The most distinctive finding of this research lies in the discovery that the hijrah movement among Indonesian urban professionals and celebrities represents not a withdrawal from modernity but a reformulation of it through moral, digital, and entrepreneurial dimensions. Participants construct an identity of “pious modernity” that integrates Islamic devotion with urban aesthetics, technological engagement, and capitalist participation. This hybrid religiosity demonstrates that piety can coexist with consumer culture, reshaping the conventional understanding of Islamic revivalism as an anti-modern force. The hijrah movement emerges as a moral economy where spirituality, media visibility, and professional aspiration mutually reinforce one another, thereby defining a new form of ethical subjectivity within Indonesia’s middle class.

The primary contribution of this study lies in its conceptual and methodological synthesis. Conceptually, it advances the framework of pious modernity by demonstrating how digital media and urban networks function as sociological agents of religious transformation. Methodologically, it introduces a triangulated ethnographic model that integrates digital ethnography, in-depth interviews, and sociocultural observation, allowing a nuanced exploration of mediated piety. This dual contribution enriches the sociology of religion by situating Islam within contemporary circuits of consumption, visibility, and identity-making, offering a theoretical bridge between local religiosity and global modernity.

The research is limited by its focus on middle- and upper-class urban contexts, which may not fully capture the dynamics of hijrah practices among lower socio-economic groups or rural communities. The emphasis on visible public figures and professionals also introduces a bias toward mediated and performative forms of religiosity. Future research should expand into comparative or longitudinal studies exploring hijrah transformations across class, region, and gender to examine whether the patterns of pious modernity persist or evolve under different social pressures. Investigations into the psychological, economic, and transnational aspects of the movement could further illuminate the global implications of Indonesia’s unique articulation of Islam and modernity.

AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTION

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

Author 2: Data curation; Investigation; Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

Author 3: Supervision; Validation; Other contribution; Resources; Visualization; Writing - original draft.

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