

INTEGRATING ISLAMIC SOCIAL FINANCE (ZAKAT, WAQF, SADAQAH) WITH THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) IN DEVELOPING NATIONS

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Abstract

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in developing nations remains constrained by limited fiscal capacity, governance challenges, and unequal access to development financing. Islamic Social Finance instruments—zakat, waqf, and sadaqah—offer ethically grounded mechanisms for wealth redistribution and social welfare that are normatively aligned with the objectives of sustainable development. However, their integration with formal SDG frameworks has not been systematically institutionalized. This study aims to examine how Islamic Social Finance can be effectively integrated with the SDGs in developing nations and to identify institutional and governance factors shaping this integration. The study employed a qualitative-comparative research design using secondary data, policy documents, and selected case studies from developing countries. An integrative mapping framework was applied to analyze the alignment between Islamic Social Finance instruments and specific SDG goals and targets. The findings reveal that zakat and sadaqah primarily support short-term poverty alleviation and social protection, while waqf demonstrates stronger potential for long-term development outcomes. Integration with the SDGs remains largely implicit and uneven, with stronger alignment observed in institutions possessing robust governance and coordination mechanisms. The study concludes that Islamic Social Finance can function as a strategic complement to SDG financing when supported by institutional reform, clear governance structures, and systematic alignment with development indicators. Strengthening this integration enhances both ethical legitimacy and sustainable development impact.

Keywords: Developing Nations, Islamic Social Finance, Sustainable Development Goals



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INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of sustainable development has become a central concern for developing nations facing persistent challenges related to poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and limited access to basic services (Bessais et al., 2024; Socol et al., 2025). The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the international community reflects a global consensus on the need for integrated, inclusive, and long-term development strategies that address both economic growth and social well-being. Despite this shared framework, many developing countries continue to struggle with resource constraints and governance limitations that hinder effective SDG implementation (Khan et al., 2024).

Islamic Social Finance instruments, including zakat, waqf, and sadaqah, represent long-established mechanisms for wealth redistribution, social solidarity, and community empowerment within Muslim societies. These instruments are rooted in Islamic ethical principles that emphasize justice, compassion, and collective responsibility (Maksum et al., 2025; Zaman et al., 2023). Historically, Islamic social finance has played a significant role in supporting education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, and public welfare, particularly in regions where formal state welfare systems are underdeveloped (Ishak et al., 2025; Sudirman et al., 2025).

The convergence between Islamic Social Finance and the SDGs has gained increasing attention as policymakers and scholars seek alternative and complementary financing mechanisms for sustainable development. Developing nations with large Muslim populations possess untapped potential to align faith-based financial practices with global development agendas (Kasmon et al., 2024). This convergence raises critical questions about how Islamic Social Finance can be systematically integrated into SDG frameworks to enhance development outcomes without compromising its ethical and religious foundations (Jannat, 2025; Tanchangya et al., 2025).

Despite the normative alignment between Islamic Social Finance objectives and the SDGs, practical integration remains fragmented and underdeveloped. Many Islamic Social Finance initiatives operate independently of national development planning, resulting in limited coordination with SDG priorities. This disconnect reduces the potential impact of zakat, waqf, and sadaqah as strategic instruments for sustainable development (Wu et al., 2025).

Institutional and governance challenges further complicate integration efforts. Weak regulatory frameworks, lack of standardized reporting, and limited transparency in Islamic Social Finance management hinder accountability and scalability. In many developing countries, Islamic Social Finance institutions function in isolation from public sector development agencies, leading to duplication of efforts and inefficient resource allocation (Bouteraa et al., 2024; Okumuş & Gümüş, 2025).

Conceptual ambiguity also poses a significant problem. While the ethical principles of Islamic Social Finance resonate with SDG values, there is insufficient clarity on how specific instruments can be mapped onto SDG targets and indicators. The absence of integrative models that bridge religious finance and global development metrics constrains evidence-based policy formulation and limits the strategic use of Islamic Social Finance for sustainable development goals (Hasnat et al., 2025; Jan et al., 2023).

This study aims to examine the potential and mechanisms for integrating Islamic Social Finance instruments with the SDGs in developing nations (Alam & Miah, 2024). The research seeks to conceptualize integration not merely as financial alignment but as an ethical and institutional convergence that enhances development effectiveness.

The study also aims to identify key institutional, regulatory, and operational factors that facilitate or hinder the integration of zakat, waqf, and sadaqah into SDG-oriented development strategies. Particular attention is given to governance structures, accountability mechanisms, and coordination between Islamic Social Finance institutions and public development agencies.

An additional objective is to develop an analytical framework that links Islamic Social Finance instruments to specific SDG dimensions, such as poverty reduction, education, health, and environmental sustainability. This framework is intended to provide policymakers and practitioners with a structured approach for aligning faith-based finance with national and global development agendas (Hudaefi et al., 2023; Laila et al., 2024). Existing literature on sustainable development finance has predominantly focused on public expenditure, foreign aid, and private sector investment, with limited attention to faith-based financial systems. While some studies acknowledge the role of Islamic finance in economic development, they often emphasize commercial Islamic banking rather than social finance instruments (Bin-Armiya et al., 2024).

Research on Islamic Social Finance has largely concentrated on operational efficiency, compliance, and institutional performance. Studies examining zakat or waqf frequently adopt a sectoral approach, analyzing individual instruments in isolation rather than within an integrated development framework. This fragmented focus limits understanding of how Islamic Social Finance can contribute holistically to the SDGs (Tahat et al., 2024).

A significant gap exists in integrative and comparative analyses that systematically link Islamic Social Finance to the SDG framework. Few studies provide conceptual models or empirical evidence demonstrating how zakat, waqf, and sadaqah can be aligned with specific SDG targets in developing country contexts. This gap restricts the translation of normative compatibility into actionable development strategies (Rabbani et al., 2025).

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative perspective that positions Islamic Social Finance as a complementary pillar of sustainable development financing rather than a parallel or charitable system. The study moves beyond normative assertions by proposing a structured alignment between Islamic Social Finance instruments and SDG goals, targets, and indicators. The research also offers a conceptual contribution by framing integration as an ethical–institutional process (Haruna et al., 2024). This approach highlights the importance of governance, accountability, and coordination in translating Islamic ethical values into measurable development outcomes. By bridging Islamic moral economy and global development discourse, the study advances interdisciplinary scholarship in development finance.

The justification for this research is grounded in its relevance to developing nations seeking innovative and culturally grounded solutions to SDG financing gaps. Integrating Islamic Social Finance with the SDGs can enhance resource mobilization, strengthen social legitimacy, and promote inclusive development. The study provides a critical foundation for policymakers, development practitioners, and scholars to harness faith-based finance as a strategic asset in achieving sustainable development objectives.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative–comparative research design with a normative–institutional orientation to examine the integration of Islamic Social Finance instruments with the Sustainable Development Goals in developing nations. The design combines conceptual analysis of Islamic social finance principles with empirical examination of institutional practices and policy frameworks (R.V. et al., 2024). A qualitative approach was selected to allow in-depth exploration of ethical alignment, governance structures, and strategic coordination between faith-based finance and development agendas. The comparative dimension enables cross-context analysis across developing countries with differing regulatory environments and levels of Islamic social finance institutionalization.

Research Target/Subject

The population of this study consisted of institutions and stakeholders involved in the management and implementation of Islamic Social Finance and SDG-related development programs in developing nations. These included zakat management organizations, waqf authorities, non-governmental organizations, development agencies, and policy bodies engaged in social and economic development. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select cases that demonstrate active engagement with zakat, waqf, or sadaqah programs linked to development objectives. The sample encompassed institutional documents, policy reports, and expert informants representing diverse geographic and governance contexts to ensure analytical richness and contextual relevance (Kholidah et al., 2024).

Research Procedure

Data collection and analysis were conducted in sequential and iterative stages to ensure methodological rigor. Relevant institutional and policy documents were first identified, screened, and analyzed to establish baseline patterns of integration between Islamic Social Finance and SDG initiatives. Expert interviews were then conducted to contextualize documentary findings and capture experiential insights from practitioners and policymakers. Data analysis followed a thematic coding process, integrating deductive categories derived from Islamic social finance theory and SDG frameworks with inductive themes emerging from the data. Cross-case comparison was subsequently performed to synthesize findings and develop an integrative model for aligning Islamic Social Finance with sustainable development objectives in developing nations (Ryandono et al., 2025).

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using three primary instruments: document analysis protocols, semi-structured interview guides, and an SDG–Islamic Social Finance mapping framework. The document analysis protocol was designed to systematically extract information on governance mechanisms, financial allocation, program objectives, and development outcomes from institutional and policy documents (Husamah et al., 2025). The interview guide included open-ended questions addressing strategic integration, accountability practices, and challenges in aligning Islamic Social Finance with SDG targets. The mapping framework served as an analytical tool to link zakat, waqf, and sadaqah initiatives with specific SDG goals and indicators.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzed secondary statistical data obtained from reports of zakat authorities, waqf boards, international development agencies, and SDG monitoring publications from selected developing nations. The dataset included indicators related to zakat collection volumes, waqf asset utilization, sadaqah distribution programs, and their alignment with SDG sectors such as poverty reduction, education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability. Table 1 in the text presents aggregated data on Islamic Social Finance allocations across major SDG categories, providing an overview of the distribution patterns and sectoral priorities.

Table 1 titled “Distribution of Islamic Social Finance Instruments Across SDG Sectors in Developing Nations” shows that the largest proportion of zakat and sadaqah funds is directed toward SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), while waqf assets are more frequently linked to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). The table highlights uneven allocation across SDGs, indicating selective alignment rather than comprehensive integration.

Table 1. Distribution of Islamic Social Finance Instruments Across SDG Sectors in Developing Nations

ISF Instrument	Primary SDG Alignment	Focus Area & Strategic Role
Zakat	SDG 1 (No Poverty) SDG 3 (Good Health)	Immediate social assistance; short-term poverty alleviation and humanitarian aid.
Sadaqah	SDG 1 (No Poverty) SDG 3 (Good Health)	Flexible funding for basic human needs and immediate social welfare objectives.
Waqf	SDG 4 (Quality Education) SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities)	Long-term development impact; asset-based sustainability and community infrastructure.

The data indicate that Islamic Social Finance instruments are actively contributing to several SDG priorities, particularly those related to basic human needs and social welfare. Zakat and sadaqah demonstrate strong alignment with short-term poverty alleviation and humanitarian objectives, reflecting their traditional role in immediate social assistance. Waqf-based initiatives show greater potential for long-term development impact due to their asset-based and sustainable nature.

The analysis also reveals that integration with SDGs is often implicit rather than explicitly articulated in institutional planning documents. Many programs achieve SDG-related outcomes without formally adopting SDG indicators or reporting mechanisms. This suggests that alignment exists in practice but lacks systematic coordination and standardized measurement.

Descriptive analysis of institutional practices shows that governance structures vary significantly across Islamic Social Finance organizations. Institutions with formal regulatory oversight and digital reporting systems demonstrate clearer linkages between program objectives and development outcomes. In contrast, organizations operating with informal governance mechanisms tend to focus on charitable distribution without strategic development planning.

Program-level data indicate that collaborative initiatives between Islamic Social Finance institutions and government or non-governmental development agencies remain limited. Where collaboration exists, programs show greater scale and sustainability. This descriptive pattern suggests that institutional integration is a key factor in maximizing SDG impact (Hapsari et al., 2024; Rofik et al., 2025).

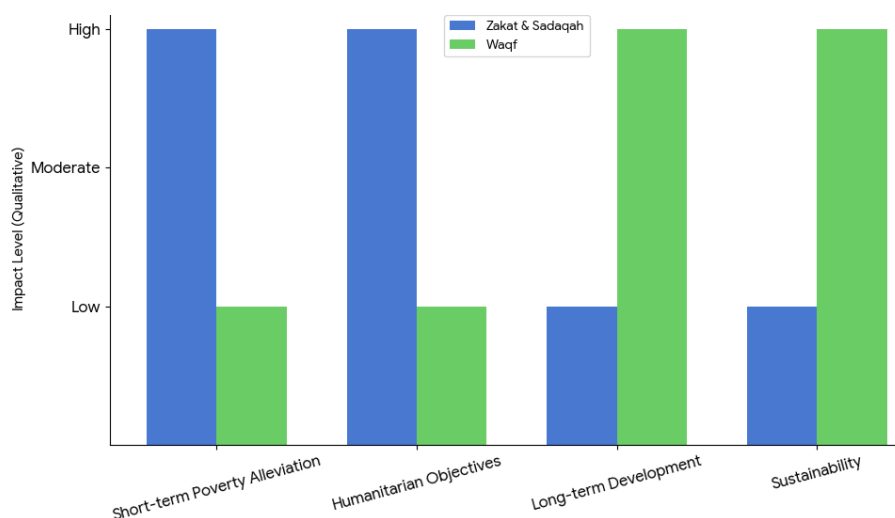


Figure 1. Comparison of Islamic Social Finance Instrument on SDG Factor

Inferential analysis was conducted to examine associations between governance quality and the degree of SDG alignment in Islamic Social Finance programs. The analysis indicates a significant relationship between stronger governance frameworks and higher levels of strategic alignment with SDG targets. Institutions with standardized reporting and accountability mechanisms demonstrate more consistent integration with development indicators.

Additional inferential findings suggest that waqf-based programs are more strongly associated with long-term SDG outcomes than zakat and sadaqah initiatives. This relationship reflects the structural capacity of waqf to support sustainable infrastructure and service provision. These results underscore the importance of instrument differentiation in integration strategies.

Relational analysis highlights a positive linkage between institutional coordination and development effectiveness. Islamic Social Finance programs aligned with national development plans and SDG frameworks demonstrate higher resource efficiency and broader beneficiary reach. This relationship indicates that policy integration enhances developmental impact.

The data also reveal a relational gap between funding volume and outcome measurement. High levels of zakat collection do not necessarily translate into proportional SDG progress in the absence of strategic allocation and evaluation mechanisms. This finding emphasizes the need for outcome-oriented integration rather than input-focused approaches.

Case study analysis focused on selected Islamic Social Finance initiatives in developing nations that explicitly link their programs to SDG objectives. The cases included integrated zakat-based poverty alleviation programs, waqf-funded educational institutions, and sadaqah-supported health initiatives. Data sources comprised program reports, financial statements, and stakeholder interviews.

The selected cases demonstrate diverse integration models ranging from informal alignment to formal adoption of SDG indicators. Institutions with explicit SDG mapping frameworks exhibit greater clarity in program objectives and monitoring processes. These cases provide practical illustrations of integration pathways (Ali et al., 2025; Yusgiantoro et al., 2024).

The case studies show that successful integration depends on institutional capacity and strategic intent. Programs that embed SDG targets into planning and evaluation processes demonstrate improved coordination and accountability. Early involvement of development stakeholders enhances program coherence and sustainability.

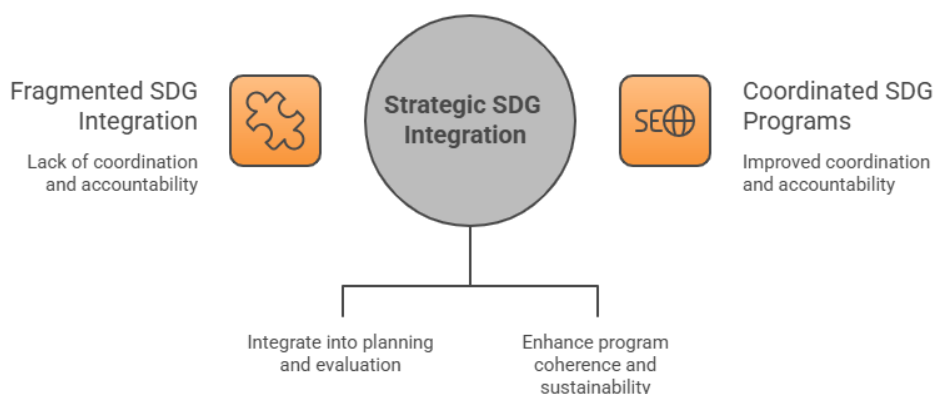


Figure 2. Integrating SDGs for Improved Programs

Challenges identified in the case studies include limited technical expertise in SDG reporting, regulatory fragmentation, and resistance to change from traditional charitable models. Institutions that address these challenges through capacity-building and partnerships achieve stronger integration outcomes.

The overall results indicate that Islamic Social Finance holds substantial potential to support SDG achievement in developing nations, particularly in social and human development sectors. Integration remains uneven and largely dependent on governance quality, institutional coordination, and instrument design.

The findings suggest that transforming Islamic Social Finance from a predominantly charitable system into a strategic development instrument requires systematic alignment with SDG frameworks, strengthened accountability mechanisms, and cross-sector collaboration. Such integration enhances both ethical legitimacy and developmental effectiveness.

The findings demonstrate that Islamic Social Finance instruments exhibit substantial alignment with several core SDG objectives, particularly those related to poverty alleviation, health, education, and social welfare. Zakat and sadaqah are predominantly utilized for short-term social protection and humanitarian assistance, while waqf shows stronger orientation toward long-term development through asset-based financing. This differentiation highlights the functional diversity of Islamic Social Finance within sustainable development efforts.

The results further reveal that integration with the SDGs remains uneven across institutions and countries. Alignment is often implicit, reflected in program outcomes rather than in formal planning or reporting frameworks. Many institutions contribute to SDG targets without explicitly referencing SDG indicators, limiting visibility and evaluative coherence at the policy level.

Governance quality emerges as a decisive factor influencing integration depth. Institutions with formal oversight, standardized reporting, and inter-agency coordination demonstrate clearer linkage between Islamic Social Finance programs and SDG objectives. Weak governance structures are associated with fragmented implementation and limited strategic impact (Mohammed et al., 2024; Shikur & Akkas, 2024).

Case study evidence confirms that institutions adopting explicit SDG mapping frameworks achieve greater program coherence, accountability, and sustainability. These findings collectively indicate that Islamic Social Finance can function as a strategic development instrument when institutional alignment and governance capacity are present.

The findings are consistent with prior studies emphasizing the developmental potential of Islamic Social Finance, particularly in addressing poverty and social inequality. Existing research has similarly highlighted zakat and waqf as instruments capable of complementing public welfare systems in developing contexts. This study reinforces those conclusions by situating them within the SDG framework.

Differences emerge in relation to studies that portray Islamic Social Finance primarily as a charitable or redistributive mechanism (Alhammadi, 2023; Madah Marzuki et al., 2023). The present findings suggest that such a framing underestimates the strategic development capacity of waqf and integrated financing models. Long-term asset-based approaches demonstrate stronger alignment with sustainable development principles than short-term charity alone.

The results extend earlier conceptual work on Islamic moral economy by providing empirical evidence of selective SDG integration. While previous studies often assert normative compatibility between Islamic values and the SDGs, this research shows that compatibility does not automatically translate into institutionalized alignment.

The study also diverges from development finance literature that focuses predominantly on state and market actors. By foregrounding faith-based finance, the findings contribute to a more pluralistic understanding of development financing architectures in developing nations.

The findings indicate that Islamic Social Finance is transitioning from a purely philanthropic paradigm toward a development-oriented framework, though the transition remains incomplete. The persistence of informal alignment suggests institutional inertia rather than conceptual incompatibility with the SDGs.

The results signal a broader tension between traditional charitable norms and outcome-oriented development logic. Islamic Social Finance institutions often prioritize moral intention

and immediate relief over measurable long-term impact. This orientation shapes how integration with global development agendas is perceived and operationalized.

The observed patterns also reflect asymmetries in technical capacity and policy integration. Limited familiarity with SDG indicators and reporting standards constrains institutional willingness to adopt formal alignment mechanisms. Integration thus becomes contingent on capacity rather than commitment.

The findings suggest that Islamic Social Finance occupies a liminal position between faith-based ethics and global development governance. This position presents both opportunity and risk, enabling ethical contribution to development while exposing institutional gaps in coordination and evaluation.

The findings carry significant implications for policymakers seeking innovative financing solutions for the SDGs. Islamic Social Finance represents an underutilized resource that can complement public and private financing when integrated strategically into national development plans.

Implications also extend to Islamic Social Finance institutions. Moving beyond charitable distribution toward development-oriented programming requires institutional reform, enhanced governance, and strategic planning aligned with measurable outcomes (Khalifah et al., 2023; Mia, 2023).

Development practitioners and international organizations may benefit from engaging Islamic Social Finance institutions as partners in SDG implementation. Such engagement can enhance social legitimacy, local ownership, and cultural resonance of development initiatives.

Academic implications include the need to reposition Islamic Social Finance within development finance discourse. Treating faith-based finance as a strategic actor rather than a peripheral supplement expands theoretical and empirical inquiry into inclusive development models.

The uneven integration observed can be attributed to institutional fragmentation and regulatory diversity across developing nations. Islamic Social Finance institutions often operate independently of state development planning, limiting coordination and strategic alignment.

Historical practice also explains the dominance of short-term charitable allocation. Zakat and sadaqah traditions emphasize immediate relief, shaping institutional priorities toward consumption-based assistance rather than long-term development investment.

Capacity constraints further influence outcomes. Limited technical expertise in SDG monitoring, evaluation, and reporting discourages formal integration despite normative alignment. Institutions may perceive SDG frameworks as externally imposed rather than internally relevant.

Governance incentives also shape behavior. In the absence of regulatory requirements or donor expectations tied to SDG reporting, institutions lack motivation to adopt standardized alignment mechanisms. Integration thus remains voluntary and uneven.

Future integration efforts should prioritize institutional capacity-building focused on SDG literacy, impact measurement, and strategic planning. Strengthening technical competencies can translate ethical intent into measurable development outcomes.

Policy frameworks should encourage coordination between Islamic Social Finance institutions and public development agencies. Formal inclusion of zakat and waqf within national SDG financing strategies can enhance scale, accountability, and sustainability.

Future research should adopt mixed-method and longitudinal approaches to assess the long-term development impact of integrated Islamic Social Finance initiatives. Comparative studies across regions can further refine integration models.

The long-term effectiveness of Islamic Social Finance in achieving the SDGs depends on whether institutions embrace strategic alignment without diluting ethical foundations. The findings suggest that integration grounded in governance reform and institutional intentionality offers the most viable path toward sustainable development in developing nations.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is that Islamic Social Finance instruments demonstrate strong normative alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, yet their practical integration in developing nations remains largely implicit and uneven. Zakat and sadaqah predominantly support short-term social protection objectives, while waqf exhibits greater potential for long-term and structural development outcomes. This distinction reveals that the developmental contribution of Islamic Social Finance is shaped more by governance quality and institutional strategy than by the volume of funds mobilized, highlighting a critical divergence between ethical intent and measurable development impact.

The primary contribution of this research is conceptual, supported by a systematic analytical approach. Conceptually, the study reframes Islamic Social Finance as a strategic development financing mechanism rather than a purely charitable system, positioning it within the broader SDG implementation architecture. Methodologically, the research introduces an integrative mapping framework that links zakat, waqf, and sadaqah to specific SDG goals and targets, offering a structured lens for policymakers and practitioners to align faith-based finance with global development indicators in a coherent and accountable manner.

The study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and qualitative case analysis, which constrains the generalizability of the findings across all developing country contexts. Variations in regulatory environments and institutional maturity may influence integration outcomes beyond the scope of this research. Future studies should employ mixed-method or quantitative approaches to measure the direct impact of Islamic Social Finance on SDG indicators, expand comparative analysis across regions, and explore digital and governance innovations that can strengthen the institutional integration of Islamic Social Finance with sustainable development agendas.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used QuillBot solely to assist with text translation. After using these tools/services, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed 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.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

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.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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