Iranian Evolutionary Educational Psychology Journal
IEEPJ
University of Hormozgan
Online ISSN: 2588 - 4395
Homepage: https://ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir

Effectiveness of Resilience Training on Flourishing and Sense of Coherence among Primary School Children

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Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:
Received 14 Feb. 2025
Received in revised form 19 Jun. 2025
Accepted 18 Aug. 2025
Published online 01 Mar. 2026

Keywords:
Resilience Training,
Flourishing,
Sense of Coherence,
Primary School Students

ABSTRACT

Objective: Childhood is a critical period for the development of resilient psychological structures. The present study aimed to determine the effectiveness of resilience training on flourishing and sense of coherence among primary school children.

Methods: This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pretest–posttest and a control group. The statistical population consisted of all primary school students in Tehran during the 2024–2025 academic year. From this population, 40 students were selected using cluster sampling and randomly assigned to an experimental group (20 participants) and a control group (20 participants). The research instruments included the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2008) and the Sense of Coherence Questionnaire (Antonovsky, 1987). The experimental group received a resilience training program (adapted from Hossein Sabet's protocol, 2012) in eight 60-minute sessions, while the control group received no intervention. Data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) in SPSS-22.

Results: The results indicated that resilience training had a significant effect on improving both dependent variables ($p < 0.01$). The findings showed that the intervention explained 51% of the variance in flourishing. In addition, significant differences were observed between the two groups in all three components of sense of coherence: comprehensibility (32.5%), manageability (27.9%), and meaningfulness (29.1%). These results indicate the sustained effectiveness of the training in shaping children's worldview and coping capacity.

Conclusions: By strengthening skills such as self-awareness, problem solving, and emotion regulation, resilience training not only promotes children's flourishing and vitality but also helps develop a coherent mental structure that increases their resistance to environmental stressors. Therefore, implementing this educational program in schools is recommended as a preventive strategy.

Cite this article: Kazeminejad, R., Azizi, Gh. & Haddadi, K. (2026). Effectiveness of resilience training on flourishing and sense of coherence among primary school children. *Iranian Evolutionary Educational Psychology Journal*, 8 (1), 1-15.
DOI: https//doi.org/ 10.22034/8.1.1

Publisher: University of Hormozgan.
DOI: https// doi.org/ 10.22034/8.1.1

Introduction

Childhood, particularly the elementary school period, represents one of the most critical and formative stages of human development. During these early years, the foundational structures of personality, belief systems, emotional regulation patterns, and coping mechanisms begin to take shape. Developmental psychologists widely recognize that experiences during this stage exert long-lasting effects on cognitive, emotional, and social functioning across the lifespan. Consequently, the psychological environment surrounding children during primary school years plays a decisive role in determining their future adjustment, wellbeing, and adaptive functioning.

In contemporary societies characterized by rapid technological transformation, increasing social complexity, and heightened environmental stressors, the psychological wellbeing of children has become a growing concern for educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals. Traditional perspectives on child mental health often equated wellbeing with the mere absence of psychological disorders. However, advances in positive psychology have shifted this deficit-oriented perspective toward a strength-based paradigm that emphasizes the cultivation of psychological capacities enabling individuals to thrive despite adversity. Within this paradigm shift, resilience has emerged as one of the most central constructs for understanding how individuals maintain psychological balance in challenging environments.

Resilience is commonly defined as the dynamic process through which individuals effectively adapt to adversity, trauma, or significant sources of stress. Rather than representing a rare or extraordinary trait, resilience has been conceptualized by Masten as “ordinary magic,” referring to the normative human capacity to mobilize internal and external resources to maintain adaptive functioning under pressure. Importantly, resilience does not merely involve recovering from difficulties; it encompasses the ability to transform adverse experiences into opportunities for psychological growth, learning, and increased competence. Research has shown that resilience operates through multiple interacting mechanisms, including emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, problem-solving abilities, supportive social relationships, and positive future orientation (Masten, 2014; Southwick & Charney, 2018; Akbari et al., 2021). For children in particular, resilience functions as a protective psychological system that buffers the harmful effects of stressors such as academic pressure, social conflicts, and family instability.

One of the most significant developmental outcomes associated with resilience is the emergence of psychological flourishing. Flourishing, rooted in contemporary wellbeing theories, represents a holistic state of optimal psychological functioning that extends beyond simple happiness or life satisfaction. According to Seligman's PERMA framework, flourishing encompasses multiple interconnected dimensions including positive emotions, engagement in meaningful activities, supportive relationships, a sense of meaning and purpose, and the pursuit of accomplishment. Children who experience flourishing are not only academically capable but also demonstrate curiosity, motivation, emotional vitality, and constructive social engagement. They show higher levels of self-confidence, adaptability, and persistence in the face of challenges. However, flourishing is not a static trait; rather, it is a developmental process that requires the presence of supportive cognitive and emotional infrastructures that enable children to recognize opportunities for growth and respond constructively to adversity. Educational interventions that cultivate resilience skills—such as problem-solving, emotional self-regulation, optimism, and cognitive reframing—can activate the psychological mechanisms that sustain flourishing over time (Seligman, 2011; Hone et al., 2015; Zare et al., 2023).

Alongside resilience and flourishing, another important psychological construct relevant to child wellbeing is sense of coherence, a concept introduced within Antonovsky's salutogenic model of health. Sense of coherence refers to a global life orientation reflecting the degree to which individuals perceive the world as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful. The comprehensibility component refers to the extent to which environmental stimuli are perceived as structured, predictable, and understandable. Manageability involves the belief that adequate resources are available to cope with life's demands. Meaningfulness reflects the motivational dimension of coherence, indicating the extent to which individuals perceive life challenges as worthy of engagement and investment. Children who develop a strong sense of coherence tend to perceive the world as intelligible and controllable rather than chaotic and threatening. Empirical evidence suggests that higher levels of sense of coherence are associated with better psychological adjustment, lower anxiety levels, stronger coping strategies, and improved social functioning.

Conversely, deficiencies in sense of coherence during childhood have been linked to increased vulnerability to stress, emotional instability, and later psychological distress. Longitudinal studies

indicate that children who struggle to interpret life events as meaningful or manageable are more likely to experience feelings of helplessness, anxiety, and disengagement during adolescence. Importantly, resilience and sense of coherence appear to be mutually reinforcing constructs. Resilience training can strengthen children's perceptions of competence and control, thereby enhancing their sense of manageability and fostering a coherent understanding of life experiences. Through repeated successful coping experiences, children begin to internalize the belief that challenges can be understood, managed, and ultimately integrated into a meaningful life narrative (Mittelmark et al., 2022; Eriksson & Lindström, 2006; Rezaei et al., 2021).

Despite the growing recognition of these psychological constructs, many traditional educational systems continue to prioritize academic performance while giving limited attention to socio-emotional competencies that underpin long-term wellbeing. Schools often focus primarily on cognitive achievement indicators such as grades and standardized test performance, whereas essential life skills—including emotional regulation, resilience, and adaptive coping—receive comparatively less systematic attention in formal curricula. This imbalance represents a critical gap, particularly given that children increasingly encounter social pressures, digital stressors, and performance expectations at earlier ages.

The existing research literature reveals another notable gap: while numerous studies have focused on diagnosing and treating psychological disorders in children, relatively few have examined preventive educational interventions designed to simultaneously enhance flourishing and sense of coherence. Within the context of Iranian student populations, empirical evidence on structured resilience-training programs remain limited, especially at the elementary school level. This gap is particularly important because developmental neuroscience indicates that middle childhood is a period of heightened neural plasticity during which socio-emotional learning can produce enduring cognitive and behavioral benefits. Interventions implemented during this stage may therefore exert long-term protective effects, equipping children with psychological resources before they encounter the heightened emotional and social turbulence typically associated with adolescence (Luthar et al., 2024; Ungar & Theron, 2023; Fathi et al., 2024).

Given these considerations, strengthening resilience during the elementary school years may serve as a foundational strategy for promoting both flourishing and psychological coherence. By providing children with structured opportunities to develop coping skills, positive cognitive

frameworks, and emotional regulation strategies, resilience-based educational programs can contribute to the cultivation of adaptive psychological systems that support lifelong wellbeing.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to address the following fundamental research question: Can resilience-training programs function as an effective educational intervention for enhancing psychological flourishing and strengthening the sense of coherence among elementary school children? Investigating this relationship not only contributes to the theoretical advancement of positive psychology and child development research but also provides practical implications for educational practitioners, school counselors, and parents. By shifting the perspective from viewing children primarily as vulnerable individuals toward recognizing them as capable and resourceful agents of development, resilience-focused interventions may help create supportive environments that nurture a generation of psychologically strong, adaptable, and flourishing individuals.

Material and Methods

The present study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pretest–posttest control group structure. This design was selected to examine the effectiveness of a resilience training program on psychological flourishing and sense of coherence among elementary school students. Participants were assigned to either an experimental group receiving the intervention or a control group that did not receive the intervention during the study period. Pretest measurements were administered to both groups prior to the intervention, followed by posttest assessments after completion of the training program. The statistical population of the study consisted of all elementary school students in Tehran during the 2024–2025 academic year. Using a cluster sampling method, one school cluster was selected and students meeting the inclusion criteria were recruited. From this population, 40 students were selected as the final sample. Participants were then randomly assigned to two groups: Experimental group: 20 students and control group: 20 students.

Random assignment was implemented to minimize selection bias and enhance the internal validity of the study. All participants were within the elementary school age range and were attending regular school programs during the data collection period.

Instruments

Sense of Coherence Questionnaire: The Sense of Coherence Scale (SOC-13) developed by Antonovsky (1987) was used to assess participants' sense of psychological coherence. This instrument consists of 13 items measuring three components: Manageability (items 3, 5, 10, 13), Comprehensibility (items 2, 6, 8, 9, 11) and Meaningfulness (items 1, 4, 7, 12). Responses are rated on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very low tendency) to 7 (very high tendency). Total scores are calculated by summing the responses across all items, resulting in a score range from 13 to 91, where higher scores indicate a stronger sense of coherence.

Antonovsky (1987) reported satisfactory construct validity for the instrument, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales ranging from 0.82 to 0.95, indicating strong internal consistency. In Iran, the questionnaire was standardized by Mohammadzadeh, Poursharifi, and Alipour (2010). Their findings indicated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.77 for the overall scale and a test–retest reliability coefficient of 0.66. Construct validity was also confirmed, and the concurrent validity with the 45-item Psychological Hardiness Questionnaire was reported as 0.54, supporting the scale's acceptable psychometric properties in the Iranian context.

Flourishing Scale: Psychological flourishing was measured using the Flourishing Scale developed by Diener and Biswas-Diener (2008). This instrument consists of 8 items designed to assess key aspects of psychological wellbeing such as positive relationships, competence, meaning in life, and engagement. Responses are measured using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The total score ranges from 8 to 56, with higher scores indicating greater levels of psychological flourishing.

Diener et al. (2008) reported good psychometric properties for the scale, including Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.87 and test–retest reliability of 0.71. In Iran, the scale was standardized by Moradi Siah-Afshadi, Ghasemi, and Ghamrani (2015) using a sample of 200 students from Isfahan University of Medical Sciences. Their results confirmed the construct validity of the scale, with Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.82 and split-half reliability of 0.80, indicating satisfactory reliability and validity in Iranian samples.

Intervention

The intervention consisted of a resilience training program adapted from the resilience training protocol developed by Hossein Sabet (2012). The training program was implemented for the experimental group over eight sessions, each lasting approximately 60 minutes (table 1). At the beginning of the study, participants were provided with a clear explanation of the research objectives and procedures. After obtaining consent and ensuring that participants understood the voluntary nature of their participation, both groups completed the research questionnaires as the pretest assessment. Following the pretest phase, the experimental group participated in the resilience training sessions conducted by the researcher over four weeks, with two sessions per week, while the control group did not receive any intervention during this period. After the completion of the training program, posttest assessments were administered to both groups using the same instruments. To ensure ethical fairness, the resilience training program was subsequently offered to participants in the control group after the completion of the study.

Table 1. Structure of the Resilience Training Sessions

Session	Title	Brief Description
1	Introduction and Self-Awareness	Establishing rapport with participants, introducing the concept of resilience, explaining workshop rules, and increasing students' awareness of their personal strengths and abilities.
2	Self-Worth	Activities aimed at strengthening self-esteem and helping children recognize their personal value and capabilities.
3	Effective Communication and Social Connection	Enhancing interpersonal communication skills, promoting healthy social interactions, and improving students' ability to form friendships and supportive relationships.
4	Future Orientation	Helping students set personal goals and learn strategies for planning and working toward their future aspirations.
5	Self-Efficacy (Decision-Making)	Teaching students the characteristics of effective decision-making and guiding them in evaluating alternatives and making appropriate choices.
6	Self-Efficacy (Problem-Solving)	Training students to analyze problems systematically, think critically about challenges, and generate constructive solutions.
7	Self-Efficacy (Responsibility)	Encouraging students to take responsibility for their behaviors and actions in school and everyday life situations.
8	Emotion Management	Teaching stress-management strategies and helping students develop skills for recognizing, regulating, and appropriately expressing their emotions.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS software version 22. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to summarize the data. For inferential analysis and hypothesis

testing, Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was employed to examine the effects of the resilience training intervention on psychological flourishing and sense of coherence while controlling for pretest scores.

Ethical Considerations

Given that the participants in this study were children, special ethical precautions were implemented. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from school authorities, and informed consent was secured from parents or legal guardians. Students were also provided with age-appropriate explanations about the purpose of the study and were informed that their participation was voluntary. Participants were assured that their personal information and responses would remain confidential, and that the collected data would be used solely for research purposes. No identifying information was included in the data analysis or reporting of results. Students were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. Furthermore, to ensure fairness and prevent deprivation of potential benefits, the resilience training program was provided to the control group after the completion of the posttest phase. All procedures were conducted in accordance with established ethical guidelines for research involving minors and educational settings.

Results

The means and standard deviations of the pretest and posttest scores for sense of coherence and flourishing in the experimental and control groups are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of pretest and posttest scores of sense of coherence and flourishing by group

Group	Variable	Pretest Mean	Pretest SD	Posttest Mean	Posttest SD
Control	Comprehensibility	16.03	3.568	16.70	3.250
	Manageability	13.11	2.596	13.93	2.712
	Meaningfulness	12.17	3.519	12.62	3.387
	Total Sense of Coherence	41.31	4.749	43.25	4.981
	Flourishing	26.07	3.337	26.77	3.041
Experimental	Comprehensibility	16.33	3.177	19.45	3.110
	Manageability	12.53	2.560	15.13	2.774
	Meaningfulness	12.90	3.334	14.74	3.465
	Total Sense of Coherence	41.77	4.818	49.33	4.164
	Flourishing	27.21	5.597	33.69	5.691

As shown in Table 2, the posttest mean scores of the experimental group increased noticeably compared with the control group, particularly in the dimensions of sense of coherence and

flourishing. To examine the effectiveness of resilience training on students' sense of coherence, Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted. First, the assumptions of the analysis were tested: The Shapiro–Wilk test confirmed the normal distribution of scores, as the obtained values were not statistically significant. The homogeneity of regression slopes between pretest and posttest scores across the experimental and control groups was confirmed ($F = 1.764$, $p > 0.05$). The Levene's test indicated equal variances across groups for the dependent variables: Comprehensibility ($F = 1.576$, $p > 0.05$), Manageability ($F = 3.826$, $p > 0.05$) and Meaningfulness ($F = 1.746$, $p > 0.05$). The Box's M test indicated equality of covariance matrices between the groups (Box's $M = 1.395$, $F = 0.205$, $p > 0.05$). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity showed a significant relationship among the variables ($\chi^2 = 26.608$, $df = 5$, $p < 0.01$).

After confirming these assumptions, the results of MANCOVA revealed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in sense of coherence (Wilks' Lambda = 0.449, $F = 9.406$, $p < 0.01$). To determine which components of sense of coherence differed between the groups, univariate ANCOVA analyses were performed. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of univariate ANCOVA comparing experimental and control groups on components of sense of coherence

Variable	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Effect Size
Comprehensibility	Between Groups	48.785	1	48.785	12.031	0.002	0.325
	Error	101.374	25	4.055			
Manageability	Between Groups	23.025	1	23.025	9.664	0.005	0.279
	Error	59.565	25	2.383			
Meaningfulness	Between Groups	15.230	1	15.230	10.256	0.004	0.291
	Error	37.125	25	1.485			

The results presented in Table 3 show that the F statistics for all three components of sense of coherence were statistically significant: Comprehensibility: $F = 12.031$, $p < 0.01$, Manageability: $F = 9.664$, $p < 0.01$ and Meaningfulness: $F = 10.256$, $p < 0.05$. These findings indicate that there were significant differences between the experimental and control groups in all dimensions of sense of coherence after controlling for pretest scores. Therefore, the resilience training program significantly improved students' sense of coherence. The effect sizes reported in Table 3 further indicate that group membership explained: 32.5% of the variance in comprehensibility, 27.9% of the variance in manageability, and 29.1% of the variance in meaningfulness.

To examine the effectiveness of resilience training on students' flourishing, a univariate Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted. The assumptions of ANCOVA were also examined: The Shapiro–Wilk test confirmed the normal distribution of the scores. The homogeneity of regression slopes was confirmed ($F = 0.903$, $p > 0.05$). The Levene's test indicated equality of variances for flourishing across groups ($F = 1.046$, $p > 0.05$). After confirming these assumptions, the results of the ANCOVA are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of univariate ANCOVA comparing experimental and control groups on flourishing

Variable	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Effect Size
Flourishing	Between Groups	91.044	1	91.044	28.129	0.001	0.510
	Error	87.391	27	3.237			

As shown in Table 4, the F statistic for flourishing was statistically significant ($F = 28.129$, $p < 0.01$). This result indicates that there was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in flourishing after controlling for pretest scores. Therefore, the findings suggest that resilience training significantly improved the level of flourishing among students. The reported effect size (0.51) indicates that 51% of the variance in flourishing can be explained by group membership, demonstrating a substantial effect of the intervention.

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the effectiveness of resilience training on psychological flourishing and sense of coherence among elementary school children. The statistical findings demonstrated that the educational intervention based on Hossein Sabet's (2012) protocol led to significant and meaningful improvements in both dependent variables. Notably, as indicated in Table 4, group membership accounted for 51% of the variance in flourishing, reflecting a very large effect size and substantial explanatory power of the intervention. Furthermore, regarding sense of coherence, the strongest impact was observed in the comprehensibility component, with an effect size of 32.5%.

The significant difference between the experimental and control groups in flourishing suggests that resilience training functions as more than a simple coping-skills program; rather, it operates as a psychological reconstruction system that strengthens children's adaptive capacities. During the initial sessions focused on self-awareness and self-worth, children learned to identify their

internal strengths and personal resources. According to Diener et al. (2008), such self-recognition constitutes a foundational element of flourishing. When children develop a sense of self-worth and confidence, they become more inclined to engage in social participation and cultivate meaningful relationships—skills emphasized in Session 3 (effective communication and social bonding).

Flourishing represents active wellbeing rather than passive contentment. When children move from a reactive stance toward stress to a proactive orientation involving goal-setting and future planning (Session 4), their developmental trajectory shifts from emotional survival to psychological growth. This transition likely contributed to the marked increase in flourishing scores observed in the experimental group. These findings are consistent with Moradi Siah-Afshadi et al. (2015) and Davis et al. (2020), who emphasized the direct relationship between empowerment-based interventions and psychological flourishing. The large effect size (0.51) underscores the developmental sensitivity of middle childhood and suggests that resilience-based educational programs can substantially elevate positive psychological functioning during this formative stage.

The results further demonstrated that resilience training significantly improved all three components of sense of coherence—comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. The strongest effect was observed for comprehensibility (32.5%). This finding may be explained by the stress management and emotional regulation techniques introduced in Session 8. By learning to recognize, label, and regulate their emotions, children likely began to perceive environmental stimuli as less chaotic and more predictable. According to Antonovsky (1987), perceiving life events as structured and understandable constitutes the cognitive backbone of coherence. When children develop emotional literacy, they are better able to interpret stressful situations in organized and rational terms rather than as overwhelming threats.

Improvements in manageability (27.9%) appear closely linked to Sessions 5 through 7, which emphasized self-efficacy in decision-making, problem-solving, and responsibility-taking. These components directly cultivate children's perceptions of control and competence. When a child learns to approach interpersonal or academic challenges using structured problem-solving strategies, their perceived mastery over the environment increases. This strengthened sense of

control aligns with Antonovsky's theoretical assertion that belief in accessible coping resources forms the core of manageability.

The enhancement of meaningfulness (29.1%) is particularly noteworthy, as meaningfulness represents the motivational dimension of coherence. The findings suggest that resilience training strengthened children's intrinsic motivation to engage with life's challenges. Rather than perceiving difficulties as purely distressing, children in the experimental group may have begun to interpret challenges as opportunities for growth. This outcome aligns with Mohammadzadeh et al. (2010), who emphasized the cultural relevance of sense of coherence in Iranian populations.

From a psychological perspective, the mechanism of change in this study may be conceptualized as a shift from learned helplessness toward psychological hardiness and agency. Elementary school children, particularly around the age of ten, are in a developmental stage where cognitive schemas about the world are consolidating. If children repeatedly experience stress without adequate coping tools, maladaptive schemas such as "the world is unpredictable and uncontrollable" may become entrenched.

The present intervention provided a structured, supportive, and psychologically safe environment—particularly through therapeutic alliance building in Session 1—combined with experiential learning activities. This environment likely facilitated schema restructuring: perceptions of the world shifted from chaotic and threatening to coherent and manageable. The 51% effect size observed for flourishing indicates that resilience skills, when taught during this critical developmental window, may serve as a preventive psychological buffer, potentially inoculating children against future emotional crises.

Practical Implications

Overall, the findings demonstrate that structured resilience training programs do not merely reduce psychological vulnerabilities but actively promote positive psychological indicators such as flourishing and coherence. These results carry important implications for educational policy and school-based mental health initiatives. Integrating resilience-focused curricula into school counseling programs may enhance students' adaptive functioning and long-term wellbeing.

Given the statistical significance and practical magnitude of the findings, it is recommended that educational authorities collaborate with psychologists to implement resilience-based protocols within school counseling centers. Such integration may shift the educational focus from deficit

remediation toward strengths cultivation, aligning school systems with contemporary positive psychology frameworks.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, the present study has several limitations. The sample size was relatively small (n = 40) and drawn from a single urban area (Tehran), which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or cultural contexts. The duration of the intervention was limited to four weeks, and no long-term follow-up assessment was conducted to determine the دوام (sustainability) of the observed effects. Additionally, reliance on self-report measures may introduce response bias, particularly given the young age of participants. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples, extended intervention periods, longitudinal follow-up designs, and multi-informant assessments (e.g., parent and teacher reports). Furthermore, incorporating parental involvement as a moderating variable in resilience training programs may strengthen the stability of sense of coherence within the family environment.

In conclusion, this study represents a meaningful step toward operationalizing positive psychology constructs within the Iranian educational system. By demonstrating that resilience training can significantly enhance both flourishing and psychological coherence among children, the findings provide a valuable framework for child and adolescent mental health professionals seeking preventive and developmental interventions.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Funding

The authors did (not) receive support from any organization for the submitted work.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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