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Knowledge, Attitude and Practice toward Inclusive Education Policy Implementation among Secondary School Teachers and Students in Awi zone North West Ethiopia

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Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices of Secondary School Students and Teachers toward Inclusive Education Policy Implementation in Awi Zone Ethiopia

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Abstract

Despite Ethiopia's progressive inclusive education policy framework, empirical evidence regarding stakeholders' readiness to implement inclusive education in secondary schools remains limited. This study examined students' and teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of policy implementation regarding inclusive education in secondary schools in the Awi Administrative Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia. A quantitative descriptive survey design was employed, with 1,001 students and 182 teachers selected through simple random sampling from three secondary schools in Chagini, Injibara, and Dangila towns. Data were collected using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire assessing demographic characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, and policy implementation. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent-samples *t*-tests, and one-way ANOVA in SPSS Version 25. Female students demonstrated significantly higher knowledge and more positive attitudes toward inclusive education than male students, whereas male students reported marginally stronger perceptions of policy implementation. Among teachers, no statistically significant gender differences were found in knowledge, attitudes, or policy implementation. Similarly, neither class size nor teaching experience significantly influenced teachers' knowledge, attitudes, or policy implementation practices. Overall, inclusive education implementation remains at a foundational stage, constrained primarily by limited teacher preparation and systemic barriers rather than demographic characteristics. Strengthening teacher training, awareness programs, institutional support, and community engagement is essential for advancing effective and sustainable inclusive education in Ethiopian secondary schools.

Key words: Secondary School, Inclusive Education, Implementation, Class Size, Work Experience

Introduction

The cultivation of critically needed and highly skilled professionals in education, which ultimately encourages profitability and eradicates hunger, illness, and apathy, makes learning a basic human right and an essential tool for fostering financial improvement, as well as in its entirety (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Social Policy and Development, 2013).

In 'Sub-Saharan Africa' and 'South and West Asia', seven out of ten people are estimated to reside (Cole, 2019). In modern times, educational inclusion has become an increasingly common idea and has gained legitimacy through numerous international conferences (Schiemer, 2017). As a result, several nations have adopted a structure protected by legislation and laws with measures to deal with special needs education generally. Only 2,300 of these students attend school, and they face a substantial risk of dropping out of school (Lewis, 2009; MoE, and Wals, A. E., 2012). As a result, impairment becomes an issue only through relationships with the community. This could lead to the community as a whole being "disabling" (Kiuppis, 2014).

The implementation of fair schooling at the international, regional, or national level has sped up efforts to re-examine the manner in which students are grouped for educational purposes, how educational institutions may set up further instruction, and how teachers may adapt the fundamental curriculum to include students with impairments (Goshu & Woldeamanuel, 2019). Basically, white missionaries played a key role in the establishment and growth of special education in Ethiopia (Price, 2018; (MoE, 2012). The government acknowledges that education is a vital human right and an important means of attaining fair growth in society and in the country (Ainscow, 2020).

Research Questions

- To identify students' and teachers' levels of knowledge, attitudes and policy implementation regarding secondary school inclusive education implementation practise in the Awi zone.
- To determine if there is a statistically significant difference in the secondary school inclusive education implementation practise in the Awi zone?

  By

  - ✓ Teachers' and students' sex
  - ✓ Number of students/class sizes

- ✓ Teachers' service years /teaching experience

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

In this study, a quantitative research approach with a descriptive survey research design was used to touch the objectives of the study. The design was chosen to identify differences between two or more variables.

Study area

This study was geographically in the Awi administrative zone, Amhara regional state, Ethiopia. In general, Ethiopia has 12 regional states and two federal administrative towns.

Participants of the study

The total population of this study were secondary school students from Chagnitown Hidase high school, Injibar town Agew Midir high school and Dangila town Mengesha jembere secondary school students and teachers respectively. It was simple random sampling techniques has been applied. Thus, one thousand one (1001 students and, one hundred ninety-six (196) teachers were participated.

Data collection tools

Scale questionnaires were used to collect data. It consists of: (I) demographic information; part (II) inclusive education Knowledge; part (III) inclusive education attitude; and (IV) Inclusive education policy implementation. Finally, measurement scales were administered. Hence, participants' level of agreement was assessed using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data cleaning, coding, and analysis were done using SPSS version 25, t-test, and ANOVA to compare inclusive education knowledge, attitude, policy implementations, and teachers' teaching experience and class size.

Ethical Considerations

The University of South Africa's Research Ethics Committee granted ethical permission for an investigation in Awi administrative zone secondary schools. The researcher obtained approval from the Awi administrative zone education bureau and presented it to the selected schools.

Results

Participant Demographic Information

Respondents were asked to provide information on the following aspects: for students (sex, age, grade level and school name) and teachers (sex, age, education level, class size /number of students in class/ and service year/working experience/).

Table 1:

Description of Student and Teacher Participants' Sex

Participants	Sex	Frequency	%	Total
Students	Male	445	44.7	996
	Female	551	55.3	
Teachers	Male	122	67	182
	Female	60	33	

As depicted in Table 1, students; 445 (44.7%) students were male and 551 (55.3%) were female. In total, 996 student participants were actively involved in this study. Similarly, 122 (67%) of the participants were males and 60 (33%) were females; a total of 182 teacher participants participated.

Table 2:

Description of Teacher and Student Participants information on study area

School Name	Participants	Frequency	%
Hidase Secondary School	Teacher	55	30.2
	Student	309	31
Agew Midir Secondary School	Teacher	63	34.6
	Student	344	34.5
Mengesha Jembere Secondary School	Teacher	64	34.4
	Student	343	35.2

As revealed in Table 2, regarding student and teacher participants study area information, Hidase secondary school teachers were 55 (30.2%) and students 309(31%); Agew Midir secondary school teachers 63 (34.6%) and students 344 (34.5%); Mengesha Jembere secondary school teachers 64 (34.4%) and students 343 (35.2%) were involved.

Table 3:

Description of Teacher Participants Work Experience

Work experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-10 years' experience	41	22.5
11-20 years' experience	106	58.2

above 21 years' experience	35	19.2
Total	182	100

Participants' work experiences were recorded in three categories: 1-10, 11-20, and more than 21 years. As illustrated in Table 3, concerning the teacher participants work experiences; 41 (22.5%) of the participants had 1-10 years; 106 (58.2%) of them had 11- 20 years and 35 (19.2%) of them had more than 21 years of teaching experience.

Table 4:

Independent sample t-test Mean Comparison of knowledge, attitude, and policy implementation across sex

Subjects	Variables	Sex	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	p
Students	Inclusive education knowledge	Male	445	16.48	3.30			
		Female	551	17.03	3.43	994	-2.56	.01
	Inclusive Education Attitude	Male	445	32.25	6.75			
		Female	551	33.19	6.22	994	-2.3	.022
	Inclusive Education Policy	Male	445	17.08	3.91			
		Female	551	16.61	3.97	994	1.87	.061

As Table 4 shows, there was a significant difference in secondary school students' knowledge of their sex between inclusive education implementation scores for males (M=16.48, SD = 3.30) and females (M = 17.03, SD = 3.34; t (994) =-2.56, p = .01, two-tailed). In other words, there was a statistically significant inclusive education knowledge difference: *t (994) = -2.56, p<.01)* between male and female secondary school students; However, using Cohen's d to quantify the effect size for the t-test of independent samples, the amount of difference between males and females was determined. Consequently, a slight difference was detected between the two groups, as indicated by the Cohen d value of 0.163. However, it does represent a trivial-sized effect Eta squared.

It reveal that in regard to secondary school students' inclusive education attitude; there was a significant difference in students' attitudes of their sex between inclusive education implementation scores of males (M=32.25, SD = 6.75) and females (M = 33.19, SD = 6.22; t (994) =--2.3, p < .022, two-tailed). In other words, there was a statistically significant

inclusive education attitude difference: *t (994) =-2.3, p <.022)* between male and female secondary school students. Additionally; additionally, using Cohen's d to quantify the effect size for a t-test for independent samples, the amount of the difference between males and females was determined. Consequently, a slight difference was detected between the two groups, as indicated by the Cohen d value of 0.145. It does represent a small-sized effect (Eta squared

Lastly, we can illustrate that there was a significant difference in secondary school students' policy implementation of their sex between inclusive education implementation scores for males (M=17.08, SD = 3.91) and females (M = 16.61, SD = 3.97; t (994) = 1.87, p = .061, two-tailed). In other words, there was a statistically significant difference in inclusive education policy implementation: *t (994) = 1.87, p <.061)* between male and female secondary school students. in this case, we can conclude that the variation of the mean implies that males have more better policy implementation towards inclusive education than female counter parts; however; Additionally, using Cohen's d to quantify the effect size for a t-test for independent samples, the amount of the difference between males and females was determined. Consequently, a slight difference was detected between the two groups, as indicated by the value of Cohen's d, which was 0.119; it did represent a small-sized effect Eta squared.

Table 5:

Independent sample t-test Mean Comparison of teachers' knowledge level, attitude level and policy implementation across sex

	Variables	Sex	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	p
Teachers	Inclusive education knowledge	Male	122	33.27	4.64	180	.64	.18
		Female	60	32.31	4.33			
	Inclusive Education Attitude	Male	122	33.00	4.57	180	-1.11	.67
		Female	60	33.30	4.03			
	Inclusive Education Policy	Male	122	22.89	4.38	180	.22	.80
		Female	60	22.00	3.82			

As can be seen in Table 5, concerning secondary school teachers' sex, there was no significant difference on teachers' inclusive education implementation knowledge scores between males (M=33.27, SD=4.64) and females (M=32.31, SD= 4.33; t (180) = .64, p=.18). In other words, there was no statistically significant difference in knowledge on inclusive education implementation among teachers (inclusive education implementation knowledge difference among teachers sex t (180) =.64, p >.18). In this statistical information, we can

confirm that the mean implies that there was no difference in inclusive education knowledge implementation between the male and female counter-parts.

Similarly, concerning secondary school teachers' sex, there was no significant difference in teachers' inclusive education implementation attitude scores between males (M=33.00, SD=4.57) and females (M=33.30, SD= 4.03; t (180) = -1.11, p > .67

Finally, concerning secondary school teachers' sex, there was no significant difference in teachers' inclusive education implementation knowledge score between males (M=22.89, SD=4.38) and females (M=22.00, SD= 3.82; t (180) =.22, p=.80). In other words, there was no statistically significant difference in knowledge on inclusive education implementation among teachers t (180) =.22, p >.80). In this observation, we can admit that the variation in the mean implies that there was no difference in inclusive education policy implementation between the male and female counter-parts.

Table 6:

One-way ANOVA Mean Comparison of Teachers' Service Years and Knowledge Level, Attitude and culture and policy practise level to wards Inclusive Education Implementations

Variables		Sum of Squares	Df	F	p
Inclusive education knowledge	Between Groups	100.409	2	1.663	.92
	Within Groups	5403.157	179		
	Total	5503.566	181		
Inclusive Education Attitude	Between Groups	65.606	2	1.235	.293
	Within Groups	4753.164	179		
	Total	4818.769	181		
Inclusive Education Policy	Between Groups	119.560	2	2.604	.077
	Within Groups	4109.034	179		
	Total	4228.593	181		

As can be seen, the One-way ANOVA Table 6 revealed that, In terms of teachers' work experience, the One-way ANOVA results show that work experience has no significant effect on inclusive education knowledge implementation. The participants mean score from the implementation of inclusive education knowledge was not statistically significantly different at the p < .05 level for the three groups of teachers work experience i.e. 1-10 years, 11-20 years and above 21 years: *F (1.663) = .92 , p>.92).*

Similarly, the one-way ANOVA result above reveals that, In terms of teachers' work experience, it has no significant effect on inclusive education attitude implementation. The participants mean score from implementation of inclusive education attitude was not

statistically significant at the p < .05 level for the three groups of teachers work experience i.e. 1-10 years, 11-20years and above 21 years: *F (1.235) = .293 , p>.293).*

The one-way ANOVA results reveal that, in terms of teachers' work experience; it has no significant effect on inclusive education policy implementation. The participants mean score from the implementation of inclusive education policy was not statistically significant at the p < .05 level for the three groups of teachers work experience i.e. 1-10 years, 11-20 years and above 21 years: *F (2.604) = .077, p>.077).*

Table 7:

One-way ANOVA Mean Comparison of Class Size and Teachers' Knowledge Level, Attitude and culture and policy practise level to wards Inclusive Education Implementations

Variables		Sum of Squares	Df	F	P
Inclusive education knowledge	Between Groups	31.828	2	.521	.595
	Within Groups	5471.738	179		
	Total	5503.566	181		
Inclusive Education Attitude	Between Groups	62.108	2	1.169	.313
	Within Groups	4756.661	179		
	Total	4818.769	181		
Inclusive Education Policy	Between Groups	33.153	2	.707	.494
	Within Groups	4195.440	179		
	Total	4228.593	181		

The participants mean score from the implementation of inclusive education knowledge was not statistically significant different at the p < .05 level for the three groups of class size i.e. 30-40 students, 41-50 students and above 50 students: *F (.521) = .595 , p>.595).*

Similarly, the one-way ANOVA result above reveals that, In terms of students number/class size/, one-way ANOVA results show that class size has no significant effect on inclusive education attitude implementation. The participants mean score from the implementation of inclusive education attitude was not statistically significant different at the p < .05 level for the three groups of class size i.e. 30-40 students, 41-50 students and above 50 students: *F (1.169) = .313 , p>.313).*

Finally, the one-way ANOVA results reveal that, in terms of teachers' work experience, it has no significant effect on inclusive education policy implementation. The participants mean score from implementation of inclusive education policy was not statistically significant at the p < .05 level for the three groups of teachers work experience i.e. 1-10 years, 11-20 years and above 21 years: *F (.707) = .494, p>.494).*

DISCUSSIONS

Teachers and students' extent of inclusive education implementation

In this study, the extent of the implications of implementing inclusive education was not as good as expected. In the study sites, the school communities were eager to implement and practise inclusive education in previous years. However, in the current situation, teachers and principals have not addressed these issues. In the current study, teaching and learning activities were abused by political and financial instabilities. In general, inclusive education has not been implemented in the desired manner. The study found that general curriculum teachers have no basic knowledge of managing learners with diverse needs. College/university courses did not prepare students adequately for inclusive environments. Generally, during the in-depth conversations, many teachers revealed that the adoption of equitable education in the chosen public secondary schools had only been completely executed.

Existing status of Teachers' and Students' Knowledge and Attitudes Regarding Inclusive Education Implementation

In this study, the findings showed that the knowledge and attitude of teachers and students were somehow limited. The practises of inclusive education in secondary schools were scarce compared with elementary schools in the study area. Social, economic, and political factors have stagnated the status of inclusive education in secondary schools in the Awi educational zone. The availability of manpower, infrastructure and society's beliefs have not been consistent with the current philosophical assumptions of inclusive education implementation. Teachers' knowledge and attitudes about inclusion varied; however, most of them were found to have theoretical knowledge on inclusive education concepts and activities.

However, there was an observable limitation in the inclusive classroom in the presentation of instruction by using different methods of teaching and instructional material usage to address the diverse needs of the students. Halder (2023) asserted that theoretical and fundamental information must be thoroughly understood by educators to ensure a better inclusive culture. In addition, Sharma and Michael (2017); Ginja & Chen (2023) found that attitudinal barriers and Forlin (2011), Yorke et al. (2022), and Kuppusamy et al. (2016) lack of ability and expertise adversely affect the practise of inclusive education.

Teachers in secondary classrooms stated that most lacked pedagogical and practical content knowledge. In their view, curriculum- and examination-driven secondary school teachers trusted upon traditional "chalk and talk" teaching methods. Similarly, Watkinson (2013) evaluated secondary teachers who were either unaware or did not want to acknowledge their

lack of pedagogical knowledge. Again, the current finding is consistent with Meidrina et al., (2017); SIDA, (2014); Costello & Boyle, (2013); Teferra, (1999), who also asserted that attitude plays a significant role in achieving inclusive education goals. Temesgen (2014), Assefa (2018), Dagnew (2013), and Singh et al. (2023) revealed those teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and abilities can be major barriers to inclusion (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019).

In other dimensions that contradict the current findings, Okech et al. (2021) found out that teachers attitudes towards learners with disabilities and other special needs were reported to be increasingly positive in the last decade; it is best support to practise inclusion.

Sex Differences in Knowledge, Attitude, and Policy Practise towards Inclusive Education Implementation among Students and Teachers

In this study finding, there were some differences in knowledge, attitudes, and policy implementation by sex.

The current study found substantial differences between the students' sex in secondary school students' knowledge and attitudes regarding inclusive education. Although some females were more knowledgeable about inclusive education and had a more positive attitude than males, some males were also better at implementing policies. Regarding the teachers, no discernible gender difference was observed in the knowledge, attitudes, and application of inclusive education policies among the teachers.

Consistently, Loria (2010) recognised the results from Georgia on the impact of educators' sex on the adoption of inclusive education. Inconsistent with the current finding, Fakolade et al. (2009), Boyle et al. (2013), and Mintesnot (2018) found that female teachers have a more favourable attitude towards inclusiveness compared to their male counterparts.

The current findings align with research conducted in the United Arab Emirates, India and Spain by Bibiana et al. (2020); Wangio, (2014); Awal, (2014); and Trivi-amigo et al. (2022), which suggested that the gender of educators had no significant influence on the implementation of inclusive education. In a similar vein, Costello and Boyle's (2013) study on "the attitudes of secondary school teachers towards inclusive education" revealed no distinction in male and female educators' views.

Similar to this, Majoko et al.'s (2018)' research in South Africa showed that managing inclusive institutions did not depend on the gender of the teachers, as both sexes were skilled at doing so. In contrast to the present research by Mashiya (2014) and Wangio (2014), a different South African study revealed that female teachers preferred male teachers over female teachers. Contrary to recent research by Parveen (2018), which revealed that women

had less of a significant difference in teacher attitudes and knowledge (feelings) when it comes to implementing inclusive education, males have a greater difference.

In other ways, consistent with the current finding, Emily and McLaughlin's (2014) studies conducted in Kenya demonstrated that male teachers were less accepting of inclusive education than female teachers, which hindered the enrolment of students with special needs in regular schools.

The present research corroborates the findings of Okech et al. (2021) that successful implementation of inclusive education requires the use of effective teaching practises to cater to the needs of students with disabilities. Additionally, as noted by Kocha and Senapathy (2022), positive attitudes towards inclusive education, effective educational procedures, and sufficient teacher knowledge of inclusion are other factors that contribute to the success of inclusive education. Though role practise, teacher comprehension, and mindsets were regarded as crucial for effective inclusivity, most teachers' views towards inclusion were often negative, which is consistent with the current study (Mohammed Alhassan, 2014). Similar to the current findings, research conducted by Ludago (2020) in Hadiya, Ethiopia, revealed issues with attitudes, skills, and abilities among educators, as well as how inclusive programmes are run in schools. Many children with disabilities do not always benefit from inclusive education; this is due to a lack of specialized instructional abilities, unfavourable teacher attitudes, and a lack of awareness of inclusion among school administrators.

Differences in Class Size in Knowledge, Attitude, and Policy Practise towards Inclusive Education Implementation among Teachers

According to some studies, material assistance and resource availability are more important for high-quality education than class size. Thus, the results of this study demonstrate that differences in student population or class size have no impact on how differently instructors apply policies or how much knowledge and attitude they possess.

Of the current findings, teachers would embrace an inclusive curriculum if there were few pupils in the class, according to Tamar (2008) and Tshifura (2012), who discovered data. Similar to this, South African researchers, Evans et al. (2009) and Swart et al. (2002) emphasised that big learning settings are considered the most difficult obstacle to effective inclusion management. Class size or total number of pupils affects teacher-student interaction, climate, and specific educational requirements. According to Pedder (2006), Sowell (2013), Pedder (2006), Sowell (2014), and Siegle et al. (2014), instructors find it more difficult to teach in larger classes and that extracurricular activities require more time.

Differences in Work Experience in Knowledge, Attitude, and Policy Practise towards Inclusive Education Implementation among Teachers

The development of the abilities necessary for successful instruction is undoubtedly aided by classroom experience. A supporting and managing diverse student body in educational settings is made easier by experience. In the current study results, work experience does not affect the knowledge, attitude, and policy implementations to practise inclusive education. Studies by Avramidis and Norwich (2010), Wangio (2014) and Awal (2015) showed inconsistent results with the current findings on the acceptance of students with physical limitations by teachers with less than six years of experience compared to those with six to ten years of experience, who showed a drop in the acceptance of students with physical limitations. Similarly, older instructors have a worse attitude towards inclusive teaching than younger teachers, according to studies by Wangio (2014a) and N'Bhroin and King (2020). Similarly, Costello and Boyle (2013) found inconsistent results when examining statistically significant attitudes of instructors with and without experience; teachers with greater experience preferred inclusive environments.

Inconsistent with the current findings, a study by Lambe and Bones (2006) in Ireland claimed that less experienced educators—pre-service teachers who had little interaction with students with a variety of special needs—were more positive about inclusion than more experienced educators. Previous research by Alghazo et al. (2004) in Dubai showed that although instructors with 12 years of experience embraced inclusive education, those with less experience were less supportive.

In contrast to the present research findings, a study by Mokaleng and Möwes (2020) demonstrated that Kenyan educators with considerable experience teaching children with special needs are more tolerant and self-assured when managing inclusive classroom environments. The study conducted by Costello and Boyle (2013) also revealed a statistically significant difference in the attitudes of instructors with and without experience, with more experienced teachers favouring an inclusive environment. The adoption of inclusive education was impacted by older teachers' less positive attitude towards inclusion than younger teachers, in contrast to studies conducted in North Florida by McKay (2016) and Georgia by Loria (2010). Consistent with a study conducted in the UAE, however, the experience of teachers had no influence on the inclusive education techniques employed (Dukmak, 2013; Wangio, 2014).

An investigation carried out in Zululand, South Africa by Chitiyo et al. (2020) found that teacher age affected the uptake of inclusive education. It was thought wise to keep older

instructors out of the inclusive system because research indicated that they were less able to adjust to new teaching methods. This was contrary to studies conducted in Tanzania and Kenya by Patrick (2013), Hofman and Kilimo (2014), and Wangio (2014), which demonstrated that more experienced teachers were better at implementing inclusive education than less experienced teachers. Both are inconsistent with the current research findings. Consistent with the results of the present research, teaching experience does not significantly affect the implementation of inclusive education, according to research conducted in Talisay District, Division of Batangas, Philippines by Masongsong et al. (2023).

CONCLUSION

This research examined how inclusive education is being implemented in the Ethiopian Awi administrative zone in the Amhara region from the perspectives of both teachers and students. The major conclusions drawn from the survey made clear that inclusive education was implemented at a very basic level. The study's quantitative results indicate that in terms of inclusive education knowledge and attitude, female students outperformed their male counterparts, but in terms of policy implementation, the reverse was true. However, no appreciable disparities were found in the understanding, attitudes, or application of inclusive education policies among teachers based on their sex.

Lastly, because there were many obstacles preventing the full implementation of inclusive education, strategies to increase its implementation were suggested. These include training sessions, advocacy, the planning and provision of awareness-raising programmes, the creation of a welcoming school environment, and government body concentration at the local level, parental active involvement, and NGO support.

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Authors' contribution

The study's concept, methodology, data collecting, and analysis were all designed by M.F. Contributed to data interpretation and prepared the first draft of the manuscript, with S.M providing critical edits and final approval.

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Declarations

Ethics Approval and consent to participate

All experimental protocols were approved by the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee, University of South Africa (UNISA), under ethics clearance reference 2024/02/14/17217288/28/AM dated 2024/02/14. All methods were carried out in accordance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was obtained from all participants (and from parents or guardians for those under 18 year.

Consent to publish

Not applicable

Consent to participate

Before participation, all individuals gave their informed consent, which was voluntary and anonymous.

Competing Interests

The authors affirm that they have no competing interests with regard to this study.

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