

# Reflections of Emotions on Daily Life: Functionality of Positive Emotions

## *Duyguların Günlük Yaşama Yansımaları: Pozitif Duyguların İşlevselliği*

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### ABSTRACT

People by nature tend to experience more positive emotions and less negative emotions. For centuries, philosophers have stated that happiness is the ultimate source of human motivation. Therefore, many individuals think that the more positive emotions they experience, the happier they will be, and they strive for it. Many different situations such as socioeconomic level, educational status, gender, culture affect the level of happiness of individuals, but the desire to be happy is present in every segment. The endless pursuit of happiness can often lead to unrealistic expectations and some psychological problems in the face of life events. The increase in positive emotions can open up more space for the person to learn, think and develop together with happiness. However, positive emotions do not consist of happiness, but there are also different emotions that contribute to happiness and nourish the person. The positive emotions experienced by the person in daily life are important in terms of better performance and healthier relationships. In this respect, when we look at the literature on this subject, it has been seen that there is a gap in the studies conducted in Turkey. Emotions are important determinants of behavior. Any risky behavior that may arise can be harmful to both the individual and the society. Emotion regulation also affects behavior positively. For this purpose, the aim of this study is to deal with positive emotions, which have not been discussed before, in a theoretical dimension, to adapt these emotions to daily life, to increase the resources that the person has and to convey their reflections on the lifestyle.

**Keywords:** Positive emotion, happiness, positive psychology

### ÖZ

İnsanlar doğası gereği olumlu duyguları daha fazla, olumsuz duyguları daha az deneyimleme eğilimindedir. Yüzyıllar boyu filozoflar mutluluğun insanın en nihai motivasyon kaynağı olduğunu dile getirmişlerdir. Bu yüzden birçok birey ne kadar fazla olumlu duygu yaşarlarsa, o kadar fazla mutlu olacaklarını düşünür ve bunun için çaba gösterirler. Sosyoekonomik düzey, eğitim durumu, cinsiyet, kültür gibi pek çok farklı durum bireylerin mutluluk düzeyini etkilemektedir ancak mutlu olma arzusu her kesimde mevcuttur. Bitmek bilmeyen mutluluk arayışı çoğu zaman gerçekçi olmayan beklentilere ve yaşam olayları karşısında bazı psikolojik problemlere yol açabilmektedir. Olumlu duyguların artması mutlulukla beraber kişinin öğrenmesi ve düşünüp gelişmesi için daha fazla alan açabilmektedir. Oysaki olumlu duygular mutluluktan ibaret olmamakla birlikte mutluluğa katkı sağlayan ve kişiyi besleyen farklı duygular da vardır. Günlük yaşamda kişinin deneyimlediği olumlu duygular, performansın daha iyi ortaya çıkması ve ilişkilerin daha sağlıklı yürütülebilmesi açısından önemlidir. Bu açıdan bu konudaki literatüre bakıldığında Türkiye’de yapılan çalışmalarda duygular ile ilgili bir boşluğun olduğu görülmüştür. Duygular davranışların önemli belirleyicileridir. Ortaya çıkabilecek her türlü riskli davranış hem kişinin kendisine hem de topluma zarar verici nitelikte olabilmektedir. Duyguların düzenlenmesi davranışları da olumlu yönde etkilemektedir. Bu amaçla bu çalışmanın amacı daha önce ele alınmamış olan olumlu duyguları kuramsal boyutta ele alarak bu duyguların günlük yaşama uyarlanması, kişinin sahip olduğu kaynakların artırılması ve bunların yaşam tarzına yansımalarını aktarmaktır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Pozitif duygu, mutluluk, pozitif psikoloji

## Introduction

Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, among the pioneers of positive psychology, drew attention to the vitality of emotions and expressed the need for the "positive psychology movement," saying, "When I was a child, I observed that some adults were desperate and depressed, while others kept their sanity and stuck to their life goals despite the chaos. Which power sources do those people rely on?" (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000). Emotions are the key components of one's inner world and relationships with others. Emotional experiences may result in positive and negative outcomes for a person (Nezlek and Kuppens 2008). The number of studies on emotions has

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**Received:** 08.09.2022 | **Accepted:** 06.01.2023

increased over the 30 years (Fredrickson 2013). However, it is noteworthy that most studies have focused on negative emotions. Historically, psychology has dealt chiefly with negative behaviors (such as aggression, psychopathology, and mental retardation). However, in recent years, there has been a trend to address positive emotions as well (Floody 2014), which mainly stems from the central goal of psychology today- resolving psychological problems and improving mental well-being. Those studies specifically have dealt with negative emotions such as anger, fear, anxiety, and sadness (Gençöz 1998, Jennifer and Dacher 2001, Cornelia and Gerhard 2003, Ewbank et al. 2009, Kandemir 2012). Positive psychology has been the subject of much research in recent years and strives to identify and figure out the factors that give rise to healthier individuals and society (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000). In the 2000s, positive emotions became the subject of several scientific studies. In this sense, the research on positive functioning and strengths has increased interest in positive emotions (Fredrickson and Cohn 2008).

Emotions undoubtedly determine our behaviors. Positive emotions and resources support individuals in the face of adverse life experiences. Psychological problems encountered in daily life cause negative emotions and negatively affect one's well-being. The relevant literature has proven that positive emotions have protective and well-being-enhancing impacts. The number of studies on emotions is minimal and preliminary in Turkey. In this sense, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature on emotions, especially in Turkey, to draw attention to these concepts and to guide new studies and intervention programs to improve mental health.

### **The Power of Positive Emotions**

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Positive emotions positively impact one's physical health, work performance, and relationship with others and provide benefits in many aspects (Armenta et al. 2017). Nelson and Lyubomirsky (2014) stated that positive emotions and responses and satisfaction of needs increase happiness. In addition to inducing physical and mental relief, positive emotions improve well-being by reducing stress and giving confidence person (Ching and Chan 2020). The latest developments and scientific research in positive psychology have focused on how to become happier today (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005, Seligman et al. 2005). Positive emotions help a person lead a more positive life (Keyes and Haidt 2003). These emotions reflect one's relationships with others, life experiences, and how to find meaning in life. They can also vary depending on life experiences. On the other hand, it is stated that focusing on the negative aspects of events triggers negative emotions and undermines positive emotions (Ching and Chan 2020). Positive emotions have been proven to enhance life satisfaction by leading people to find various resources (Fredrickson et al. 2008). It has also been observed that optimistic people are often likely to show greater resilience in unfavorable situations (Tugade et al. 2004).

Seligman (2002) discussed positive emotions in three categories: past, present, and future. Emotions such as satisfaction, contentment, and pride are associated with the past. Positive emotions such as hope, confidence, optimism, and faith are associated with the future. Lastly, pleasure is a positive feeling associated with the present. Thus, he indicated that only those who have or always seek positive emotions in the past, present, and future could lead a happy and satisfactory life. Seligman also underlined the key role of positive attitudes and optimism in leading a long life and having well-being. They also directly increase psychological well-being (Tugade et al. 2004, Lyubomirsky 2011).

### **Positive and Negative Emotions**

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Emotions have many functions, both positive (e.g. joy, hope, gratitude) and negative (e.g. sadness, anger). A person's positive or negative emotions are an important determinant of psychological and social outcomes (Fredrickson and Losada 2005). Positive emotions stimulate positive experiences. For example, the sense of satisfaction positively impacts a person, thus positively changing their approach to an undesired life event (Fredrickson and Cohn 2008). Negative emotions, on the other hand, trigger many different negative emotions and result in unfavorable outcomes (Talarico et al. 2004). Positive emotions can relieve or eliminate the harmful effects of stress (Garland and Howard 2009). Unlike positive emotions, negative emotions can cause several mental problems (e.g. depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and suicide) (Kiecolt-Glaser et al. 2002). It can also be suggested that positive emotions have a critical role in preventing depression (Höhn et al. 2013). While negative emotions offer a limited set of solutions only focused on survival, positive emotions extend the focus of attention and offer a broader perspective (Armenta et al. 2017). While a feedback loop relying on positive emotions stimulates goal-oriented behaviors, a feedback loop involving negative emotions causes disconnection (Diener et al. 2020). Negative emotions are more likely responses or reactions to an unexpected threat, yet, positive emotions help a person to take advantage of many opportunities in life (Fredrickson and Cohn 2008). Various studies have shown that positive emotions act as a buffer against the harmful effects of negative

emotions and foster psychological resilience (Tugade and Fredrickson 2004, Cohn et al. 2009, Micheal et al. 2009, Gloria and Steinhardt 2014). Hence, it can be inferred that positive and negative emotions complement each other.

### **Frederickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory**

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Fredrickson developed the Broaden-and-Build theory in 1998, wanting to capture the unique effects of positive emotions rather than other models focusing on negative emotions. This theory mainly claims that positive emotions broaden thought-action repertoires and lead to actions that promote develop permanent personal resources (Fredrickson 1998, 2001). This theory also argues that positive emotions facilitate establishing social networks and provide longer-term well-being and commitment (Höhn et al. 2013).

The Broaden-and-Build theory propose that positive emotions have a common function: broadening cognitive capacity to develop personal resources (Fredrickson 2013). The "broaden" aspect of the theory refers to several functions such as perception, attention, motivation, and cognition, while the improved version of those functions characterizes the "build" aspect to develop more resources (Ching and Chan 2020). Ultimately, broadened and enriched positive emotions increase the possibility of positive experiences. This theory, which argues that positive emotions cause positive outcomes, has certain implications. First, positive emotions improve attention and cognition and encourage people to acquire new and creative behaviors. Secondly, positive emotions affect not only thoughts but also actions by expanding them. In other words, positive emotions urge people to develop alternative and new behaviors for unexpected situations, new opportunities, or skills. The third implication suggests that maintaining positive emotions gives rise to positive outcomes in life (Fredrickson 1998). According to this theory, positive emotions help individuals develop durable resources, have a broader thinking perspective, and have a flexible and rich behavior set (Fredrickson et al. 2008, Cohn et al. 2009).

Recent findings have shown that positive emotions play critical roles in helping people improve themselves and exhibit positive behaviors (Armenta et al. 2017). According to the Broaden-and-Build theory, positive emotions allow people to build psychological, intellectual, and social resources as well as expand their thinking-and-acting repertoire. In this sense, enhancing positive emotions results in developing long-term social and regulatory resources (Stifter et al. 2020). Contrary to positive emotions, negative emotions narrow the thought-action repertoire (Fredrickson 2000). Therefore, positive emotional experiences increase resilience and are important for personal well-being and psychological health (Fredrickson and Branigan 2005). Fredrickson and Losada (2005) suggested that although positive experiences seem to have short-term and instant effects, they form durable and reliable resources in the background.

A broad cognition, triggered by positive emotions, encourages a person to contribute to the world, pursue a meaningful purpose, and build a better and optimistic self, as well as many physical, social, psychological, and social resources (Fredrickson and Branigan 2005, Schmitz et al. 2009). Expanding facilitates building durable personal resources (Fredrickson and Cohn 2008). The complementarity between negative and positive emotions outlined in the Broaden -and-Build theory has implications for negative emotion regulation. That is, positive emotions can "fix" or "undo" the effects of negative emotions, which is called the "undo effect" (Fredrickson and Levenson 1998). Accordingly, positive emotions play a protective role against the long-term and harmful effects of negative emotions by expanding the thought-action repertoire.

In his theory, Fredrickson (2013) proposed ten core positive emotions, which he suggested to be the most common positive emotions in life. The ten core positive emotions are as follows:

### **Ten Core Positive Emotions**

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1. **Joy:** It often manifests itself when a situation brings luck unexpectedly. People feel joy when they hear good news or a sudden surprise (Fredrickson 2013). Watkins (2020) indicates that joy is an essential positive emotion that should be explicitly considered for human development.
2. **Gratitude:** It has an important place in Fredrickson's (2013) Broaden-and-Build theory. This emotion triggers the urge to think creatively about new ways of being kind and generous, which helps individuals to develop durable resources. In parallel with the increasing number of studies on positive psychology in the 21st century, the research on gratitude has also risen (Franzese and Seigler 2020). The feeling of gratitude is characterized by a) achieving a positive outcome b) that derives from an external source (Emmons and McCullough 2003). In the Broaden-and- Build theory, gratitude is an essential motivator for both self-development and positive change (Emmons and Mishra 2011). Although gratitude is a response to kind

treatment, it also triggers one to behave politely toward unfamiliar people (Bartlett and DeSteno 2006, Layous et al. 2017). Therefore, gratitude is typically classified as an emotion felt for others (Michie 2009). Social emotions such as pride in our success, love for attachment figures, and gratitude for those who help us are reflective actions (Haidt and Morris 2009).

3. **Serenity:** This emotion simultaneously arises with life satisfaction and enjoyment of present conditions. Serenity is accompanied by the feeling of peace and comfort and also supports a person in creating durable resources (Fredrickson 2013). Peace can be considered a personal and unique way of life featured by behavioral and cognitive components associated with feeling calm and relaxed (Floody 2014).
4. **Interest:** It refers to people's tendency to prefer anything that appeals to them, which is also more remarkable than other options. Interest is an emotion that increases general well-being (Richman et al. 2005). It also improves well-being by enriching physical, cognitive, and social resources (Fredrickson 2013). It plays a substantial role in acquiring knowledge and expertise in a specific topic (Silvia 2008).
5. **Hope:** Hope especially appears in negative life events and instills the belief that things will be fine. It is accompanied by striving and resilience, which supports building durable resources (Fredrickson 2013). An optimistic future perspective and hopeful expectations are the characteristics of hope. However, contrary to optimism, hope is closely associated with a sense of control, purposefulness, and improvement. It strongly indicates psychological well-being (Rand and Fischer 2020).
6. **Pride:** It derives from the people's dignity of what they have achieved (Fredrickson 2013). Similarly, pride is defined as a positive emotional state based on one's own success or others' (Harth 2017). Pride is mostly a positive emotion that stems from a self-assessment process considering the coherence between the self and the social and cultural norms. The urge for self-improvement, physical well-being, and seeking the attention or gaze of others underlies pride. Pride is an emotion that develops later in life rather than core emotions such as joy and fear. Behavioral and verbal indicators of pride can be observed in children aged 2.5-3. However, it cannot be observed in embarrassing situations (e.g. failure) or easy achievements in younger children. The capacity to recognize pride emerges after experiencing it (Tracy et al. 2014). However, excessive and inappropriately expressed pride may lead to disapproval and ostracization (Sullivan 2014).
7. **Amusement:** This emotion emerges in less challenging situations that individuals enjoy (Fredrickson 2013). Amusement depends on one's inner experiences and conveys the message of having self-coping skills as well as having fun (Floody 2014). Amusement is characterized by an autonomously chosen mental or physical activity, different from daily experiences, in which the process is more important than the product (Barnett 2014).
8. **Inspiration:** Inspiration appears when people somehow encounter splendid perfection (Fredrickson 2013). This emotion inspires the urge to transcend oneself and realize the highest potential of self. It offers durable sources, which gives motivation (Algoe and Haidt 2009). Thrash and Elliot (2004) define inspiration as an effort motivated by the intrinsic value of an object. Inspiration refers to the motivation to convey or enrich the valuable attributes of an object.
9. **Awe:** This emotion is characterized by appreciating a greater expanse of life (Shiota et al. 2007). Keltner and Haidt (2003) underline two concepts in the emergence of awe: perceived vastness and a need for accommodation. In general terms, awe is the mind's adaptation attempts by creating new schemas in processing new stimuli. This concept can also refer to a state of "transcendence." Awe significantly affects one's perception of themselves as part of a more significant and meaningful reality (Shiota et al. 2014). People feel awe when they exceed themselves, which makes awe an emotion felt for superior others.
10. **Love:** Love, which appears to be the most common positive emotion people feel, emerges when any positive emotions are felt in a secure, interpersonal relationship or commitment. It mediates the formation of many durable resources, such as affection, commitment, and coupling (Fredrickson 2013). Diamond (2014) characterized love as the multifaceted nature of liking (including behaviors, cognitions, and emotions), the motivational power of compassion (i.e. the desire to begin or maintain a relationship), and single goal orientation. He also emphasized that love has a long-lasting effect on human health and well-being.

Emotions involve physiological, cognitive, and social processes (Izard 2009). The discipline of psychology initially adopted a disorder or deficiency-oriented approach, focusing on weaknesses and finding solutions to eliminate them (Anand 2019). Studies have shown that the difference between those who can improve themselves and those who cannot stem from the number of positive emotional experiences (Catalino and Fredrickson 2011). Excessive negative emotion is a defining feature of anxiety and mood disorders, including

depression. Negative emotions also play a role in various disorders. For example, somatoform disorders (i.e., medically unexplained pains) cause emotional distress (Matthews et al. 2011).

## **Emotion Regulation**

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The capacity to regulate emotions is as important as being aware of them. The concept of emotional regulation derives from a model proposed by Gross (1998). This model has two strategies for regulating emotions: reappraisal and suppression. In the reappraisal strategy, intending to relieve the emotional burden, the goal is to change how a life event is interpreted by reconsidering it. On the contrary, the expression of inner feelings is inhibited in the suppression strategy. Studies have shown that only the reappraisal strategy effectively reduces emotional burden (Gross 2002; Gross and John 2003). According to Frederickson's Broaden- and-Build model, positive emotions expand one's perspective and enrich thought-action repertoire, which supports reappraisal and emotion regulation capacity (Fredrickson 2001). Regulating negative emotions may be more complicated than regulating positive emotions (Nezlek and Kuppens 2008).

Emotion regulation skills are acquired in the early years and become evident in early childhood. It has been shown that children tend to be more capable of emotion regulation with a better understanding of the vocabulary related to emotions and feelings and the opportunities to talk about their emotions. Emotions are socialized in three ways: emotion modeling, conditioned response to emotion, and talking about and discussing emotion. Emotion modeling refers to how children learn about emotions in their environment. Conditioned response to emotion is the process in which children learn about emotions by how they respond to the emotions of others. Talking about and discussing emotions is the third way children learn about emotions. In each process, emotional knowledge is built with others. Children's modeling of emotion depends on their familial, cultural, and social backgrounds. In this sense, children's emotions reflect the many cultural features and the key figures in their lives and interactions (Bailey and Rivers 2018). When parents overreact to their children's negative emotions, children may experience aggression or frustration intensely (Fabes et al. 2001). As children acquire emotional knowledge, they improve their ability to regulate their own and others' emotions. It was shown that children who could regulate their emotions were more motivated to engage in productive learning experiences and to learn (Graziano et al. 2007).

## **The Role of Positive Emotions in Daily Life**

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Until recent years, research focused on the reasons for people's unhappiness and well-being was ignored. However, the number of researchers discussing well-being has increased (Diener 2009). Along with Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), an interest in positive emotions and positive psychology has been aroused. Fredrickson drew attention to positive emotions in improving well-being. In addition to several interventions and coping strategies to increase well-being, he pointed to the techniques to foster positivity, such as enjoying the moment, finding meaning, gratitude, hope, flow experiences, and connecting with others (Floody 2014).

Positive emotions considerably flourish social relationships by helping a person develop durable resources (Fredrickson and Losada 2005). Such feelings also make people less vulnerable to health problems (Tugade et al. 2004). Reed and Ones (2006) found a positive correlation between doing exercise and positive emotions. Meditation has also been found to increase positive emotions (Fredrickson et al. 2008). Donations or giving gifts also increase positive emotions (Dunn et al. 2008). Another study revealed that young children were happier when they shared a toy with a friend than when they bought it (Aknin et al. 2012). Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) found that positive lifestyle changes such as doing charity work, being more grateful, or exercising contributed to well-being. Others' positive feedback and reactions following the desired activity affect the happiness of those who help. It was observed that doing favor increased happiness by the mediating role of others' gratitude (Tkach 2006). Nelson and Lyubomirsky (2014) stated that how people think and act is directly related to their happiness. They also indicated that positive activities increase positive emotions. In another study, positive emotion was positively correlated with well-being and success indicators such as health, relationships, and work (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005).

Positive emotions influence a person's faith, creativity, and coping skills, as well as job commitment, cooperation, and performance. These emotions lead to positive cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and physical outcomes. They contribute to one's performance in all areas of life (Diener et al. 2020). Several studies showed that positive emotions have a powerful and positive effect on job engagement (Schaufeli and Salanova 2006; Ouwenel et al. 2012). Those with more positive emotions experience less physical discomfort (Cohen et al. 2003, Gil et al. 2004, Lyubomirsky et al. 2005, Cohen and Pressman 2006) and have a longer life expectancy

(Ostir et al. 2000, Danner et al. 2001, Levy et al. 2002, Moskowitz 2003, Diener and Chan 2011). Similarly, people with mood disorders experience lower levels of positive affectivity (Dejonckheere et al. 2019, Nelson et al. 2020, Heininga and Kuppens 2021). Pressman and Cohen (2005) indicated that positive emotions are of critical importance, regardless of negative affectivity. In their study, King et al. (2006) showed that positive emotions could predispose people to feel that life is meaningful and to be sensitive to life events. Steptoe et al. (2007) concluded that positive emotions are related to biological and daily life factors, which may protect health. Ostir et al. (2000) stated that, unlike negative emotions, positive emotions protect individuals against the risk of death. All the mentioned findings prove the favorable impacts of positive emotions on mental health.

Vatan (2017) examined the relationships between emotions and psychopathological symptoms in the Turkish literature on positive and negative emotions. Özer and Tezer (2008) found that individuals with high hope levels had higher positive emotions. Similarly, Telef (2014) revealed that adolescents with intense negative emotions due to adverse life events were more likely to engage in risky behaviors. Similarly, in a study on adolescents, negative emotions partially mediator problematic internet use (Kuzucu et al. 2020). According to the Gallup Global Emotions Report (2021), in 2020, Turkey had the lowest positive emotions among 145 countries, which showed a similar trend as Turkey's being the fourth country with the lowest positive experience in the 2019 report announced in 2020. Relying on this report, it can be inferred that culture and social structure affect emotions, but no study has examined emotions in a cultural context in Turkey so far. However, many studies in the literature prove that cultural factors are influential in emotion regulation (Butler et al. 2007, David et al. 2008, Kwon et al. 2012, Ford and Mauss 2015). Those examples underline the need for studies on emotions in Turkey.

## Conclusion

Emotions are the key elements that bond us both with our inner self and the outside world. How we express our emotions, verbally or behaviorally, is the precise point where we differ from other living things. Positive and negative emotions have specific functions in many aspects of life. Behaviors are undoubtedly reflections of our emotions. Emotions are critical, especially in terms of relationships and life perspectives. The Broaden-and-Build Theory, which Fredrickson developed by addressing the importance of positive emotions, presented a practical framework suggesting that positive emotions restore one's social and physical resources by intensifying attention, focus, and behaviors. Based on this framework, an increase in positive emotions has a protective effect on mental health. Considering positive emotions' benefits for both physical and psychological health in daily life, studies and interventions should focus on increasing positive emotions for individual and social well-being.

Most of the research in the literature examined the causes of disorders. However, increasing personal resources and expanding the range of positive emotions can reduce many psychological and even physiological disorders. In this sense, being aware of and using personal resources is an important skill. Even if a person does not have a resource, rebuilding will be useful in both individual and interpersonal relationships. All emotions create us, influence our thoughts and guide our behaviors, whether positive or negative, but positive emotions are unlikely to harm a person. Undoubtedly, every emotion stimulates a personality change that shapes life. Psychoeducational programs on emotions, especially positive emotions, would be beneficial. Additionally, a course for emotional knowledge can be integrated into the school curricula, which thus students can recognize both their own and others' emotions..

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**Authors Contributions:** The author(s) have declared that she has made a significant scientific contribution to the study and has assisted in the preparation or revision of the manuscript

**Peer-review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Conflict of Interest:** No conflict of interest was declared.

**Financial Disclosure:** No financial support was declared for this study.