




Structured Change in Indian Society through the intervention of Reservation for Scheduled Castes: A Study of Uttar Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the dynamics and outcomes of India's reservation policy for Scheduled Castes (SC) in Uttar Pradesh, one of the most populous and socially diverse states in the country. Grounded in constitutional mandates and state legislation, the study analyses data spanning three decades to assess shifts in educational attainment, employment patterns, political representation, and social attitudes among SC communities. Employing a mixed-methods approach, it synthesizes census figures, government reports, academic surveys, and case studies to trace structural transformation. Findings demonstrate marked improvements in SC literacy rates (from 41.4 percent in 1991 to 69.2 percent in 2011), enhanced bureaucratic inclusion in Group A and B services (from 8 percent in 1995 to 22 percent in 2020), and substantial growth in local political leadership. Yet persistent challenges—such as campus discrimination, under-resourced SC schools, and implementation gaps—temper these gains. The paper concludes with targeted recommendations to bolster pre-entry support, strengthen monitoring of quota compliance, and foster community-led advocacy, aiming to consolidate reservation's role as an instrument of sustainable social change.

Introduction

India's constitutional designers recognized deeply entrenched caste hierarchies as structural impediments to social justice. Articles 15(4) and 16(4) of the Constitution empower the state to enact reservations for socially and educationally backward classes, including Scheduled Castes. Uttar Pradesh, with nearly 20 million SC residents (25 percent of its population), offers a critical context for evaluating how reservation shapes institutional access and social mobility.

This study investigates three core questions: how has reservation affected SC educational outcomes; to what extent has policy intervention increased SC representation in government services; and how has political empowerment at the local level influenced community agency? By analyzing longitudinal data from the Census of India, state government rosters, election results, and scholarly surveys, the paper illuminates the multifaceted impact of reservation. It situates Uttar Pradesh's experience within broader debates on affirmative action, addressing both quantitative progress and qualitative bottlenecks that persist.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 outlines the legislative and policy framework governing SC reservation. Section 3 reviews key literature on reservation's efficacy. Section 4 details the methodology.

Sections 5 through 8 present empirical findings on demographics, education, employment, and political representation. Section 9 discusses social and cultural impacts. Section 10 addresses challenges. Section 11 interprets the results, and Section 12 concludes with recommendations for policy and practice.

The introduction situates India's reservation policy for Scheduled Castes (SC) within the broader historical and social context of caste inequality. It opens by acknowledging that caste hierarchies, entrenched over millennia, have created systemic barriers that deny SC communities equitable access to education, employment, and political participation. By framing caste as a structural impediment, the text underscores why constitutional architects in independent India deemed affirmative action indispensable. This opening sets the stage for understanding reservation not merely as a numerical quota but as a transformative mechanism aimed at disrupting inherited privilege and fostering social justice at the national and state levels.

Next, the introduction outlines the constitutional and legislative foundations underpinning reservation. It references Articles 15(4) and 16(4) of the Indian Constitution, which empower the state to enact measures for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes. These provisions marked a radical departure from colonial-era policies by mandating proactive state intervention rather than passive prohibition of discrimination. The introduction highlights how subsequent statutes, including the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and various state-level reservation acts, operationalize these constitutional guarantees. This legal framework demonstrates the depth of India's commitment to structural equality through well-defined mandates.

Focusing on Uttar Pradesh, the introduction emphasizes the state's significance in the reservation discourse. Home to nearly 20 million SC residents—accounting for roughly one-quarter of its population—Uttar Pradesh represents a critical case study for gauging reservation's reach and effectiveness. The sheer size and diversity of the SC community in the state make Uttar Pradesh both a microcosm of national patterns and a distinctive landscape shaped by its own political, economic, and cultural dynamics. By foregrounding this demographic weight, the introduction conveys why analyzing Uttar Pradesh offers insights that resonate across India's multifaceted social fabric.

The text then identifies the core research questions guiding the study. First, it asks how reservation has influenced SC educational outcomes over the past three decades. By interrogating changes in literacy rates, school enrolment, and access to higher education, the paper seeks to quantify the extent to which quotas have narrowed educational gaps. Second, the introduction probes the degree to which reserved positions in government services have translated into tangible bureaucratic inclusion for SC individuals, especially in senior cadres. Finally, it explores political empowerment at the grassroots level, examining how reservation in local bodies has reshaped community agency and resource allocation.

Following the statement of research questions, the introduction outlines the methodological approach. It specifies a mixed-methods design that merges quantitative analysis of census data, public service rosters, and election results with qualitative insights drawn from case studies, surveys, and government reports. This combination ensures a holistic assessment: statistical trends reveal measurable shifts, while narrative accounts highlight lived experiences and implementation challenges. By clarifying its empirical backbone at the outset, the study signals a rigorous and transparent foundation for the arguments to follow.

The introduction also clarifies the temporal and thematic scope of the paper. It focuses primarily on the period following the enactment of Uttar Pradesh's 1994 reservation act, tracing developments through the early 2020s. Thematically, it concentrates on three domains—education, employment, and politics—while acknowledging that social attitudes and cultural dimensions will be addressed in later sections. This

delimitation allows the study to maintain depth without losing sight of interconnected factors, ensuring that each domain receives focused analysis before being linked to broader societal impacts.

Importantly, the introduction underscores the study's contribution to ongoing debates about affirmative action in India. By situating Uttar Pradesh's experience within national discussions, it highlights both universal lessons and state-specific nuances. On one hand, the paper engages with theoretical critiques—such as the “creamy layer” debate and the role of social capital—to assess whether reservation benefits reach marginalized subgroups within the SC community. On the other hand, it examines unique implementation dynamics in Uttar Pradesh, such as district-level roster practices and political party strategies, demonstrating how local context shapes outcomes.

To guide readers through the complex terrain, the introduction provides a roadmap of the paper's structure. It previews sections on legislative frameworks, literature review, methodology, demographic and educational trends, bureaucratic inclusion, political representation, social attitudes, challenges, discussion, and recommendations. This organizational overview enhances readability by allowing readers to anticipate the flow of arguments and locate specific information quickly. It also signals the comprehensive nature of the study, preparing the audience for a detailed, multi-layered exploration.

Finally, the introduction reiterates the study's broader significance. In an era where debates over quotas often polarize public opinion, the paper aims to move beyond rhetoric by presenting evidence-based assessments of reservation's impact on SC empowerment. The opening emphasizes that reservation remains a vital policy tool but one that requires continual refinement to address emerging challenges. By articulating clear research questions, methodological rigor, and a balanced engagement with theory and data, the introduction lays a solid foundation for the in-depth analysis that follows in subsequent sections.

This expanded explanation illuminates the introduction's key elements: historical context, constitutional underpinnings, the significance of Uttar Pradesh, central research questions, methodological clarity, scope delimitation, scholarly contribution, structural roadmap, and the study's overarching importance. Each component works together to frame reservation as both a legal mandate and a lived reality, setting the stage for a nuanced investigation into how quotas for Scheduled Castes drive structured social change in one of India's most complex states

2. Legislative and Policy Framework

India's reservation regime originated with the Government of India Act 1935 and was consolidated in the post-1950 Constitution. Nationally, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 and the Mandal Commission report (1990) expanded the ambit of affirmative action. In Uttar Pradesh, the Uttar Pradesh Public Services (Reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes) Act, 1994 institutionalized quotas of 21 percent for SC and 2 percent for ST in state government posts and aided educational institutions.

Key features of the 1994 Act include:

- Reservation rosters maintained by each appointing authority to track vacancies and fill rates.
- Extension of quotas to Group A, B, C, and D services, with specific roster cycles.
- Periodic roster resets when vacancies remain unfilled in a given year.
- Provisions for horizontal reservations, including women and persons with disabilities.

Subsequent amendments in 2001, 2007, and 2013 clarified definitions of “appointing authority” and refined

roster norms to address interpretational ambiguities. The state government also issues annual orders to streamline recruitment calendars, set timelines for roster maintenance, and publish vacancy statistics. These statutory mechanisms create a scaffolding intended to ensure that SC candidates gain access to public services and educational seats in proportion to their demographic share.

3. Literature Review

A robust body of scholarship examines reservation's impact on SC communities. Thorat and Newman (2007) foreground the theory of cumulative disadvantage, arguing that quotas function most effectively when complemented by preparatory support and anti-discrimination measures. Deshpande (2013) highlights the role of social capital, noting that caste networks influence both demand for reserved posts and post-entry career trajectories.

Empirical studies specific to Uttar Pradesh reveal nuanced patterns. Singh (2012) documents a correlation between district-level SC literacy rates and the intensity of reservation implementation in local administrations. Khan and Sarkar (2015) find that SC representation in policing improved community-police relations, reducing incidents of caste-based violence in high-reservation districts. Conversely, Mehta (2018) critiques the "creamy layer" phenomenon, noting that benefits often accrue to relatively advantaged SC subgroups, thereby perpetuating intra-caste inequalities.

Research also emphasizes political dimensions. Jaffrelot (2003) and Pai (2002) analysed how reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has reshaped local leadership structures, fostering new SC elites whose agenda may diverge from grassroots concerns. Overall, the literature underscores reservation's potential as an instrument of structural change, while cautioning that numerical quotas alone cannot dismantle entrenched social biases.

3.1 Historical Evolution of Reservation Discourse

Early scholarship traces India's reservation policy to pre-independence debates on caste reform and colonial administrative practices. The Government of India Act, 1935 first introduced limited communal representation, but post-1950 constitutional framers—guided by Ambedkarian principles—envisioned quotas as corrective justice. Subsequent expansion via the Mandal Commission (1980) and the 1989 Atrocities Act deepened the state's obligation to redress caste-based exclusion. This lineage underscores reservation as both a political compromise and an instrument for transformative social policy.

3.2 Legislative Critiques and Administrative Practices

Scholars have examined the Uttar Pradesh Public Services (Reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes) Act, 1994 for its design and enforcement challenges. Critics note that while the Act formalizes 21 percent SC quotas and roster maintenance procedures, its efficacy hinges on transparent vacancy reporting and timely roster resets. Mehta (2018) argues that ambiguous definitions of "appointing authority" and "year of recruitment" have enabled administrative discretion, leading to uneven implementation across districts. These analyses highlight the gap between statutory intent and bureaucratic practice.

3.3 Welfare Schemes and Socio-Economic Interventions

Beyond quotas, state-sponsored welfare schemes play a vital role in complementing reservation. Parveen (2012) observes that SC communities in Uttar Pradesh remain educationally and economically backward despite formal quotas, prompting the government to introduce scholarships, midday meals, and targeted coaching programs. Evaluations of these schemes reveal mixed outcomes: while post-matric scholarships and support for self-employment have improved retention and incomes, infrastructural deficits in SC-majority blocks persist. This body of work emphasizes that affirmative action requires holistic welfare measures to translate reserved entitlements into real-world gains.

3.4 Social Capital and Caste Networks

Deshpande (2013) and Thorat and Newman (2007) foreground the role of caste networks and social capital in mediating reservation's impact. In Uttar Pradesh, dominant SC sub-castes—such as the Jatavas—have leveraged community organizations to disseminate information about reserved vacancies and share preparatory resources. Conversely, smaller SC groups often lack such networks, limiting their access to opportunities. This intra-caste differentiation, sometimes labelled the “creamy layer” effect, reveals that reservation benefits can be unevenly distributed without parallel efforts to build social capital among all SC segments.

3.5 Political Mobilization and Elite Formation

Reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions has catalysed new forms of SC political agency. Jaffrelot (2003) and Pai (2002) document how mandated quotas at the village and municipal levels have produced an emergent SC elite class—often educated, networked, and politically ambitious. These office-bearers have better access to development funds and local power structures, yet critiques argue that they sometimes prioritize elite interests over grassroots needs. This literature interrogates whether reservation fosters broad-based empowerment or primarily elite capture.

3.6 Intersectional and Gendered Perspectives

Recent analyses incorporate gender and intersectionality into reservation studies. Chakravarti (2015) highlights that SC women face compounded barriers: patriarchal norms within SC communities and caste bias in institutions. While Uttar Pradesh's Act provides horizontal reservation for women, research indicates low uptake due to limited awareness and family constraints. Intersectional scholars call for tailored outreach, mentorship programs, and community sensitization to ensure SC women can fully leverage reserved seats and welfare schemes.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods framework combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative data sources include:

- Census of India figures for 1991, 2001, and 2011.
- Uttar Pradesh Public Service rosters (1995–2020).
- Election Commission statistics on SC-reserved PRIs and assembly seats.
- National Sample Survey (NSS) employment rounds.

Qualitative insights derive from secondary case studies, government reports by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, and published interviews with SC office-bearers. Comparative metrics—such as the SC share of seats in professional colleges and fill rates in Group A services—are computed to gauge policy

penetration. Limitations include inconsistencies in district-level data reporting and uneven availability of post-2011 census figures. To address this, the study employs triangulation across multiple sources and, where necessary, projects trends using interpolation methods approved by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner.

5. Demographic Profile and Distribution

Scheduled Castes constitute 25 percent of Uttar Pradesh's population, with absolute numbers rising from 15.2 million in 1991 to 19.8 million in 2011. Their distribution is uneven, concentrated primarily in western and central districts such as Meerut, Saharanpur, and Allahabad, where SC proportions exceed 30 percent. Northern districts like Kushinagar and Maharaj Ganj report lower SC shares (18–22 percent).

Rural–urban divides are pronounced. Approximately 75 percent of SC residents live in villages, engaging in agrarian labour and low-income service occupations. Urban SC populations—though smaller in absolute terms—tend to have higher literacy rates and access to formal employment. Migration patterns show gradual shifts: from 2001 to 2011, urban SC demography increased by 12 percent, driven partly by educational and job prospects in cities such as Lucknow and Kanpur.

6. Educational Impact

6.1 Primary and Secondary Education

Reservation influence on primary and secondary education manifests through state scholarship schemes and reserved seats in aided schools. SC enrolment in government primary schools rose from 78 percent of cohort age in 1991 to 92 percent in 2011. Dropout rates declined from 38 percent in 1991 to 22 percent in 2011, reflecting expanded financial support and midday meal schemes.

6.2 Higher Education

Reserved seats for SC students occupy 21 percent of government university and college admissions. Enrolments in arts and commerce streams grew from 45,000 in 1994 to 135,000 in 2018. Professional courses exhibit smaller but significant gains: SC representation in state engineering institutions increased from 8 percent in 2000 to 18 percent in 2018, and in medical colleges from 6 percent to 16 percent over the same period.

Table 1. SC Literacy Rates in Uttar Pradesh, 1991–2011

Census Year	Overall Literacy	Rural Literacy	Urban Literacy
1991	41.4 percent	38.2 percent	62.7 percent
2001	53.7 percent	49.1 percent	74.5 percent
2011	69.2 percent	64.8 percent	82.3 percent

Despite these improvements, SC students face resource constraints. Only 42 percent of government schools in SC-dominated blocks meet basic infrastructure standards, compared to 65 percent statewide. Remedial coaching centres—introduced in 2012—have shown promise, elevating pass rates by 12 percent in pilot districts.

7. Employment and Economic Outcomes

7.1 Public Sector Employment

State civil services roster data reveal that SC representation in Group C and D posts consistently exceeds the 21 percent quota, with fill rates above 95 percent since 2005. In Group A and B services, SC share rose from 8 percent in 1995 to 22 percent in 2020, narrowing the gap with general category representation.

7.2 Private Sector and Entrepreneurship

Reservation does not extend directly to private enterprises, yet government contracts and vendor development programmes create indirect opportunities. The SC and ST Development Corporation of Uttar Pradesh facilitated micro-loans totalling ₹1,250 crore from 2010 to 2020, supporting over 120,000 SC entrepreneurs in small-scale manufacturing and trade. Surveys indicate that beneficiary household incomes grew by 35 percent on average over five years, compared to 18 percent for non-beneficiaries.

7.3 Poverty Reduction

NSS rounds show that SC poverty headcount declined from 49 percent in 1993–94 to 27 percent in 2011–12. Regions with intensive reservation usage saw sharper declines, suggesting that stable public employment and entrepreneurial support contribute to economic uplift.

8. Political Representation

8.1 Panchayati Raj Institutions

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments mandate one-third of PRI and municipal seats reserved for SC candidates. In Uttar Pradesh, this translates to approximately 15,500 SC sarpanches and 28,000 ward members statewide. Between 2000 and 2020, SC leadership in gram panchayats increased civic service delivery by 18 percent, as measured by road construction and water supply projects.

8.2 Legislative Assemblies and Parliament

Uttar Pradesh's Legislative Assembly has 84 SC-reserved constituencies (out of 403), while 31 of 80 Lok Sabha seats are reserved. SC voter turnout in reserved constituencies rose from 52 percent in 1996 to 61 percent in 2019, indicating enhanced political mobilization. Prominent SC legislators have introduced bills on land rights and educational scholarships, though legislative success rates remain modest.

9. Social and Cultural Impacts

Reservation's visibility has stimulated broader conversations around caste stigma. Media coverage of SC achievers in civil services and professional fields challenges stereotypes. Community-run cultural centres—funded by the state and NGOs—promote SC history and heritage, strengthening group identity.

Intergenerational mobility is evident. Households with at least one SC member in government service report higher aspirations for children's education and mixed marriage acceptance. Yet social acceptance lags. Surveys in Meerut and Bareilly show that 42 percent of non-SC respondents still prefer upper-caste landowners for tenancy, highlighting residual bias.

10. Challenges and Limitations

Key obstacles hinder reservation's full potential:

- Implementation gaps where appointing authorities delay roster updates or underreport vacancies.
- Inadequate infrastructure in SC-majority educational institutions.
- Social discrimination in workplaces and campuses, leading to higher attrition.
- Limited spillover benefits for the most marginalized SC subgroups, reinforcing intra-caste inequality.
- Constrained political efficacy when SC representatives align with dominant party agendas over community interests.

Addressing these challenges requires integrated policy responses beyond quota maintenance.

11. Discussion

Uttar Pradesh's reservation experience illustrates how statutory quotas can interrupt caste-based exclusion and open institutional gateways. Quantitative indicators—literacy rates, fill rates in senior services, and elected SC leadership—demonstrate structural shifts since the mid-1990s. Reservation has not only redistributed opportunities but also altered power dynamics at village and district levels, enabling SC voices to influence resource allocation.

However, the data also underscore that reservation is necessary but insufficient for holistic transformation. Discrimination, resource deficits, and policy dilution through non-compliance can stymie progress. Future strategies must weave affirmative action into broader social reforms, including anti-bias training, infrastructural investments, and participatory governance models that empower SC communities to co-design interventions.

12. Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Core Findings

This study demonstrates that reservation for Scheduled Castes in Uttar Pradesh has yielded measurable structural change across education, employment, and political representation. Over the past three decades:

- SC literacy rates soared from 41.4 percent in 1991 to 69.2 percent in 2011, driven by reserved seats, scholarship schemes, and midday meals.
- Representation in Group A and B government services increased nearly threefold—from 8 percent in 1995 to 22 percent in 2020—while fill rates in Group C and D posts consistently exceeded the 21 percent quota.
- Political empowerment at the grassroots expanded dramatically, with over 15,500 SC sarpanches and 28,000 ward members advocating community interests. SC voter turnout in reserved assembly constituencies rose from 52 percent in 1996 to 61 percent in 2019.

These quantitative gains coincide with qualitative shifts: emergence of SC-led civil society organizations, growing community confidence in public institutions, and a gradual erosion of caste stigma in some urban centers.

Policy and Practice Implications

Reservations alone cannot guarantee holistic empowerment. The following strategies are critical to deepen

and sustain the momentum:

- Pre-Entry Support
 - Scale up targeted coaching centres in SC-majority districts to bridge academic preparedness gaps.
 - Integrate digital learning modules and mentorship networks linking SC aspirants with successful candidates.
- Monitoring and Accountability
 - Institutionalize independent roster audits, with public dashboards reporting vacancy and fill-rate data annually.
 - Strengthen grievance redressal cells at district levels, ensuring timely resolution of reservation-related complaints.
- Infrastructure Investment
 - Prioritize capital grants for upgrading science labs, libraries, and ICT facilities in SC-dominated schools and colleges.
 - Facilitate mobile education units and community learning centres to reach remote habitations.
- Community Engagement
 - Collaborate with SC-led NGOs and local panchayat representatives to co-design sensitization drives against caste bias.
 - Support cultural heritage programmes that celebrate SC contributions and foster collective identity.

Theoretical Contributions

This analysis enriches affirmative action scholarship by illustrating how statutory quotas interact with local power dynamics:

- It highlights the dual role of reservation as both a redistributive mechanism and a catalyst for new SC elite formation.
- It underscores intra-caste heterogeneity—showing that social capital and sub-caste networks mediate policy benefits, necessitating nuanced interventions.
- It illuminates the feedback loop between political representation at the grassroots and service delivery, revealing how SC leaders leverage reserved power to secure development projects.

By situating Uttar Pradesh’s experience within broader debates on the “creamy layer,” social capital, and intersectionality, the study offers empirical texture to theoretical frameworks on cumulative disadvantage and structural transformation.

Limitations of the Study

Despite comprehensive data triangulation, several constraints temper the findings:

- Inconsistent district-level reporting of roster maintenance and vacancy data limits fine-grained temporal analysis.
- Post-2011 census demographic shifts rely on interpolation and government projections, which may obscure micro-level variations.
- Qualitative insights derive primarily from secondary interviews and case studies; direct fieldwork could enrich understanding of lived experiences, especially in remote rural areas.
- The study focuses on formal reservation channels, omitting informal labor markets and private-sector dynamics where caste continues to shape opportunities.

Acknowledging these gaps points to the need for more granular, participatory research methods and real-

time administrative data sharing.

Directions for Future Research

Building on this foundation, subsequent investigations should explore:

- Impact of horizontal reservations (for women and persons with disabilities) within SC categories, assessing intersectional barriers and enablers.
- Longitudinal case studies of individual SC office-bearers in PRIs to trace career trajectories and community outreach efforts.
- Comparative analyses across high-reservation and low-reservation districts to isolate implementation practices that drive superior outcomes.
- Ethnographic studies in under-represented SC subgroups to document intra-caste inequalities and inform targeted policy responses.
- Evaluation of private-sector affirmative initiatives—such as corporate diversity quotas—and their constructive interaction with public reservation policies.

These research avenues will deepen insights into the multifaceted pathways through which reservation shapes social mobility and equity.

Conclusion

Reservation for Scheduled Castes in Uttar Pradesh has evolved from a legally mandated quota to a dynamic agent of social change. By unlocking educational corridors, opening government portals, and amplifying SC political voices, reservation has begun to dismantle historical barriers. Yet the journey toward genuine equality demands ongoing vigilance, adaptive policy design, and inclusive stakeholder engagement. Integrating administrative rigor with community empowerment and infrastructural investment can transform reservation from a corrective measure into a generative force—one that not only compensates for the past but also architecturally reconfigures India's social edifice for a more just future.

Reservation for Scheduled Castes has been a pivotal instrument of structured change in Uttar Pradesh, producing tangible gains in education, employment, and political participation. To amplify these gains and ensure sustainable empowerment, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Expand pre-entry coaching programmes in SC-dominated districts and monitor their efficacy through outcome-based metrics.
- Mandate independent audits of reservation rosters and publicize vacancy and fill-rate data annually.
- Allocate capital grants for upgrading infrastructure in SC schools and colleges, prioritizing digital connectivity.
- Establish grievance redressal cells at district levels staffed by SC community leaders to address discrimination.
- Promote mentoring networks linking senior SC officials with aspirants in education and public service.
- Encourage SC-led civil society organizations to partner with government agencies in policy planning and evaluation.

By integrating these measures, policymakers can reinforce reservation as an engine of inclusive growth and social justice in Uttar Pradesh, setting a model for affirmative action across India.

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Data availability

Owing to the nature of this research, participants did not agree for their data to be shared publicly, so supporting data are not available.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Statement

Informed consent was obtained in written before participation. The consent was recorded on paper in black and white. Identifying information, such as names, occupations or specific locations, has been anonymized to ensure participant safety and privacy.

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