

Experience of gender based violence among in-school adolescents during COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

Background: Gender based violence (GBV) is a societal problem which has a worldwide prevalence. There are media reports that the lockdown measure against COVID-19 pandemic may increase the incidence of GBV in the home but empirical evidence is lacking. This study aimed to assess adolescents' experience of gender based violence during the COVID 19 lockdown in Ibadan, a southwestern Nigeria city.

Methodology: This was a descriptive cross sectional study among 520 adolescents from both private and public secondary schools selected using multistage sampling technique. Semi-structured questionnaire was developed, pretested and validated before being self-administered to collect data on socio-demographic characteristics and parental factors associated with experience of GBV. Data were collated and analyzed using frequency, chi-square. IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for windows version 20 was used in running the analysis.

Result: Respondents were 266 (51.2%) females and 254 (48.8%) males, Aged 15.28±1.40years (females) and 15.64±1.53 years (males), and lived with both parents (n=367, 70.6%). Over half of the respondents fathers (n=224, 55.6%) and mothers (n=204, 53.2%) are educated to tertiary level. Respondent's parents were mostly semi-skilled workers (Fathers n= 279, 53.7%; Mothers n=272, 52.3%). Most of the adolescents (n=315, 60.6%) have high gender equitable attitude towards violence (females n=187, 36%; males n=128, 24.6%). Gender is a factor that is significantly associated with attitude / acceptance of violence (χ^2 21.56, P=0.000). Most of the respondents' parents are currently married & living with their partner (n= 413, about 79%). Reported experience of GBV was high during the pandemic and includes sexual violence (n=248, 47.7%); psychological violence (n=334, 64.2%) and cyber violence (n=84, 16.2%).

Conclusion: The findings of the study suggested that COVID-19 pandemic lockdown was associated with an increased in the incidence of GBV especially in homes.

Keywords: Gender based violence; Sexual violence; Psychological violence; Cyber violence; Adolescents; COVID 19

1. Introduction

According to the United Nations (UN) violence against women is defined as any act of gender based violence that results in, or likely to result in physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threat of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (UNGASS 1993). Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is defined as the behavior by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or

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psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behavior. Thus gender based violence encompasses "Sexual violence" and "Violence against women". The different types of Gender based violence cannot be easily differentiated since they are not mutually exclusive, however gender based violence includes; Domestic violence, sexual harassment, marital rape, sexual abuse/assault, sexual violence during conflict and harmful customary or traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage, trafficking, forced prostitution, violations of human right in armed conflict (murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy), forced sterilization, forced abortion, female infanticide, pre-natal sex selection.

Globally nearly 1 in 3 or 30% of women have been subjected to physical and or sexual violence by an intimate or non-intimate sexual partner or both. It was found out that more than a quarter of women aged (15-49 years) who have been involved in a relationship has been exposed to physical and /or sexual violence by their intimate partner once in their lifetime.

The regional estimate prevalence rate of IPV and Non- Intimate Partner Violence ranges from 27.2% to 45.6% with the Europe, high-income countries, and WHO Regions of the American having a lower rate (27.2%- 36.1%) while the WHO African, Eastern Meditterrean &South East Asia region having a higher rate (40.2-45.6%). Also 20-75% were estimated to experience psychological abuse from a partner in their life [1].

The COVID-19 pandemic which sprung from the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 has changed the course of a significant share of the global population. After the confirmation of the first case of COVID-19 in the city of Wuhan, China from December 2019 until April 8, 2020 there had been a record of 1,500,830 confirmed cases and 87,706 deaths in the world. Tang and colleague reported that the outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on March 11, 2020 [2]. Because of the vast disperse of the disease and community transmission in many countries, social containment measures was suggested in various countries, including Nigeria. The measure implemented by the World Health Organization (WHO) to contain the pandemic includes isolation of suspected cases and social distancing. However, such endorsement at various level has harsh consequences on economic activities and family life in the society. In diverse places, the lockdown method adopted to stop the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) occasioned negative consequential effects such as loss of income, isolation, overcrowding, stress and anxiety, domestic violence (gender based violence) child abuse and neglect, which put women and children at an increased risk of harm. This rise in the risk is not unexpected as disasters in the past has been connected with a rise in cases of gender based violence. It was reported that there was a surge in intimate partner violence during earthquake in Haiti in 2007, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and eruption on Mount Saint Helens in the 1980s. This same occurrence was experienced and reported during the Tsunami and the Ebola outbreak [3]. According to the report it can be concluded that the restriction of people to their homes during pandemics and disasters, could be associated with increase in gender based violence because victims may be unable to escape from their abusers (UN Joint Global Programme, 2020).

A report given by the United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) says that 1 out of 4 Nigerian girls and one out of 10 boys has been sexually abused before they turn 18 which agrees with the data provided by the UNICEF global database 2017 [4]. Adolescents are often vulnerable group that are likely to be affected and experience a time of difficult transition [5]. Adolescents are exposed to different types of violence in their relationships, in their homes, at school and in the community. In most low income countries, adolescents are exposed to increase level of violence and victimization in their social environments.

Report of domestic violence support services usage was found to increase significantly in countries where lockdown was implemented [6] [7]. The global surge in domestic violence was not entirely unexpended. There are media reports that the lockdown measure against COVID-19 pandemic may increase the incidence of GBV in the home but empirical evidence is lacking. This study aimed to assess adolescents' experience of gender based violence during the COVID 19 lockdown in Ibadan.

2. Methods

2.1. Study setting

The study was carried out in Ibadan North Local Government Area (LGA) of Oyo state. Ibadan North local government area has a land mass of 145.58km² and a population of 308,119 people with adolescents population of 60,570 (NPC, 2006). It was created by the Federal Military Government of Nigeria on 27th September, 1991 carved the area out of the defunct Ibadan Municipal Government along with others. The LGA has multi-ethnic nationalities, though predominantly by Yoruba's, others include Igbo, Urhobo, Hausa, Ijaw, Itsekiri.

2.2. Study Population

The study population comprised of male and female secondary school students from public and private schools between the ages 15-19 years attending schools sited in Ibadan north local government area. In Nigeria, secondary education runs for six years and comprises of a junior secondary education for three years and senior secondary for another three years, both running simultaneously. Adolescent boys and girls were present in the school during the study period were included in the study. The exclusion criteria includes adolescent boys and girls who were absent from school during the study period, whose parent do not consent or do not assent to participate.

- **Study Design:** This study is a descriptive cross-sectional study.
- **Sample size-** Sample size was calculated using the two sided test formula for single proportion based on the assumption that the proportion of persons 15-19 years who had experienced physical and sexual violence was 28.3% [8]. Design effect was taken to be 1.5 at a significance level of 5%. A minimum sample size of 468 respondents was estimated. A 10% adjustment was made for non-response which resulted in a minimum sample size of 520 respondents.

2.3. Sampling Technique

A two stage sampling technique was used to select the respondents. In stage one, from the list of all public and private schools in Ibadan North LGA, two public schools and private schools each were selected by simple random sampling: A total of four schools were therefore selected. The actual population of each school was obtained to calculate the proportionate sample size required in the school selected. In stage two, Respondents were chosen by convenience from each arm of the school.

In order to obtain cooperation from the school administrators so as to gain access to the students, advocacy visits was made to the schools in July 2021 to discuss the study with the school administrator. The school authorities gave their commitment and the teachers were available to provide support when it was needed.

2.4. Study Instrument

A semi structured self- administered questionnaire was used for quantitative data collection. The questionnaire was divided into subsections on demographic characteristics, self-reported experience of violence behaviors during the lockdown, and exposure to violence in the home. The data collection instruments was extracted from previous studies by Fawole et al., (2018) and WHO Multi-Country study (2005).

In order to get a precise knowledge about the subject matter (GBV) from the respondents, questions on experience of physical, sexual and psychological violence were asked by giving examples of such act like "Has anyone touched you in any sensitive area of your body?, Do you feel threatened by someone?, were you often shouted at by anyone?. In order to assure the validity and reliability of the survey data, the questionnaire was pre-tested among 30 adolescents in Ibadan North East local government area, Ibadan, Oyo State which was outside the study area.

2.5. Data collection

The sampled schools were visited during school period for the administration of the questionnaire. Respondents were supervised in the filling and collection of the filled questionnaire was made immediately. A research assistant was recruited and trained to assist in supervision of the data collection. The research assistants was trained for two days by the investigator. Informed consent and respondents assent was obtained before data collection. It took about 15 minutes to fill the questionnaire.

2.6. Study Variables

The dependent measures includes: experience of physical, sexual, psychological and any one of the three forms of violence stated above. The WHO definition of violence was adopted. A positive response on at least One of the following acts (beaten, hit, slapped in the face, bitten, pushed, punched, grabbed, had an object or acid thrown at them, or threatened with a dangerous weapon) defines experience of physical violence. Sexual violence referred to sexual harassment at home or neighborhood , unrequested touching of breast or buttocks, unwanted kisses, being forced to watch sexually explicit materials, attempt to rape (including by using drugs or charms), rape, being forced to engage in sex for money or material goods, and being forced to terminate a pregnancy. Spoken words to intentionally belittle, spite, humiliate, intimidate the respondent was defined as psychological violence.

The independent variables were selected socio demographic characteristics and information on the family background of the respondents. The demographic variables included sex, age, class and religion, while the family background questions were parent's education and occupation. A 16-item, 5 point scale (Likert scale) on the attitude and acceptance of GBV among adolescents was used to measure the gender equitable attitude among adolescents ranging from 1- strongly agreed to 5- Strongly disagree. For each individual the total score on attitude or acceptance of violence were summed into a composite score that ranged from 0-80. The maximum score obtainable was 80. Scores were categorised as low, moderate and high gender equitable attitudes as follows: 0-24 indicates less gender equitable attitudes, 25-52 for moderately equitable attitude and 53-80 for more equitable attitudes which was thereafter collapsed into low and high gender equitable attitude.

2.7. Data Management

Data obtained from the study was coded, cleaned, entered and analyzed into a computerized database using the statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 20. Data collected from the field was entered on a daily basis to avoid missing or mixing up of data. The data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to present in a concise and understandable form of information gathered from the study. The results were subjected to appropriate statistical analysis using Pearsons chi square analysis and logistic regression at 95% confident interval and p-value of < 0.05.

2.8. Ethical Consideration

Respondents were able to decide independently without any coercion, whether or not to participate in the study, right to withdraw at any time. They were afforded the right not to answer any questions that caused discomfort or not or not to disclose personal information. Approval of the study was acquired from UI/UCH Ethic Review Committee with UI/UCH Ethics Committee assigned number UI/EC/21/0336.

3. Result

Of the five hundred and twenty (520) respondents that were recruited into the study, 254 (48.9%) were males. The mean age ($\pm$ SD) for males was 15.64($\pm$ 1.53) and females 15.28($\pm$ 1.40) with an overall mean age of 15.46($\pm$ 1.47). From the public schools majority (n=131, 50.4%) of respondents were male while from private schools majority of the respondent were females (n=137, 52.7%). Majority (n=224, 43.1%) of the respondents were in S.S.3, Christian (n=308, 59.2%), Yoruba (n=451, 86.7%) and are currently staying with both parents (n=367, 70.6%).

Table 1 Socio-demographic characteristics of participants

Socio-demographics	Male n (%)	Female n (%)	Total n (%)
Mean age (SD)	15.64(1.53)	15.28(1.40)	15.46(1.47)
Age group			
10-14	55(41.0))	79(59.0)	134
15-19	199(51.6)	187(48.5)	
School type			
Public	131(50.4)	129(49.6)	260
Private	123(47.3)	137(52.7)	260
Class			
SS1	62(52.1)	57(47.9)	119
SS2	84(47.5)	93(52.5)	177
SS3	108(48.2)	116(51.8)	224
Religion			
Christianity	148(48.1)	160(52.9)	308
Islam	106(50.0)	106(50.0)	212

Ethnicity			
Hausa	2(18.2)	9(81.8)	11
Igbo	30(51.7)	28(48.3)	58
Yoruba	222(49.2)	229(50.8)	451
Family type			
Monogamous	194(47.0)	219(53.0)	413
Polygamous	60(56.1)	47(43.9)	107
Position in family			
1 st	95(55.2)	77(44.8)	172
2 nd	66(46.2)	77(53.9)	143
3 rd	48(39.3)	74(60.7)	122
4 th	26(49.1)	27(50.9)	53
Currently stays with			
Father	11(68.8)	5(31.3)	16
Mother	47(56.6)	36(43.4)	83
Guardian	19(35.2)	35(64.8)	54
Both parent	177(48.2)	190(51.8)	367

Table 2 shows subgroup analysis (based on gender of the respondents) on the attitude and acceptance of gender-based violence. It revealed situations in which a girl is justified for being beaten as opinioned by the respondents. More of the males (n=55, 21.7%) as compared to females (n=40, 15.03%) agreed that a girl deserves to be beaten when she talks rudely to a boy. Similarly, higher proportion (n=87, 34.3% of males) agreed that it is justified to beat a girl that reacts to a boy harassment compared to females (n=58, 21.8%). About two-third males (n=164, 64.6%) and females (n=160, 60.2%) agreed that a girl who is cantankerous deserves to be beaten. However, both males (n= 149, 58.7%) and females (n=155, 58.3%) of female agreed that forced sex is unacceptable. In addition about half of both the males (n=131, 51.6%) and females (n=143, 53.8%) disapproves of a man hitting his wife.

Table 2 Attitude to adolescent's acceptance of violence

	Male n=254			Female n=266		
In what situations do girls deserve to be beaten?	Agree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Disagree	Not sure
She talks rudely to a boy	55(21.7)	186(73.2)	13(5.1)	40(15.03)	209(78.6)	17(5.6)
She goes out to play without permission	121(47.6)	108(42.5)	25(9.8)	157(59.0)	77(28.9)	32(12.0)
She is lazy with household chores	143(56.3)	77(30.3)	34(13.4)	179(67.3)	65(24.4)	22(8.3)
She reacts to a boy's harassment.	87(34.3)	121(47.6)	46(18.1)	58(21.8)	150(56.4)	58(21.8)
She is lazy with homework	149(56.7)	60(46.5)	45(47.4)	147(49.7)	69(53.5)	50(52.6)
She is cantankerous	164(64.6)	53(20.9)	37(14.6)	160(60.2)	64(24.1)	42(15.8)
The boy and girl should have equal power in a dating relationship	133(52.4)	82(32.3)	39(15.4)	148(55.6)	71(26.7)	47(17.7)
A man is never justified in hitting his wife	131(51.6)	87(34.3)	36(14.2)	143(53.8)	90(33.8)	33(12.4)
A boy can hit his girlfriend if she annoys him	34(13.4)	180(70.9)	40(15.7)	30(11.3)	221(83.1)	15(5.6)

A boy can force his girlfriend to have sex	34(13.4)	199(78.3)	21(8.3)	25(9.4)	234(87.9)	7(2.6)
Hitting one's girlfriend is okay	26(10.2)	197(77.6)	31(12.2)	20(7.5)	223(83.8)	23(8.6)
A boy can hit his girlfriend if he abuses him in public	58(22.8)	162(63.8)	34(13.4)	35(13.2)	193(72.6)	38(14.3)
A boy can sometimes hit his girlfriend to have her under control	66(25.9)	144(56.7)	44(17.3)	41(15.4)	186(69.9)	39(14.7)
It's okay for a boy to have sex with his girlfriend if she has collected money	72(28.3)	148(58.3)	34(13.4)	42(15.8)	196(73.7)	28(45.2)
It is very wrong to force a girl to have sex	149(58.7)	75(29.5)	30(11.8)	155(58.3)	86(32.3)	25(9.4)
A girl who makes her boyfriend jealous on purpose deserves beating	51(20.1)	139(54.7)	64(25.2)	41(15.4)	185(69.5)	40(15)

Table 3 Overall Acceptance of GBV among Adolescents

Attitude	Males	Females	Total	Chi-square	p-value
Low	126(24.2)	79(15.2)	205(39.4)	21.56	0.000*
High	128(40.6)	187(59.4)	315(60.6)		

* = Statistically significant $P < 0.05$ **Table 4** Pattern of Gender-Based Violence Experienced during the Lockdown

Violence	Male	Female	Total
Physical			
kicked, dragged or beat	143(56.5)	110(43.4)	253(100)
Slap	181(52.2)	166(47.8)	347(100)
Thrown objects/acid	125(52.3)	114(47.7)	239(100)
Hit	139(58.2)	100(41.8)	239(100)
Push	144(50.5)	141(49.5)	285(100)
Bite	98(52.4)	89(47.6)	187(100)
Threaten with weapon.	41(53.3)	36(46.8)	77(100)
Sexual			
Unwanted touch	61(41.2)	87(58.8)	148(100)
Unwanted kiss	61(37.7)	101(62.4)	162(100)
Forced exposure to sexually explicit materials	49(39.8)	74(60.2)	123(100)
Attempted rape	29(26.9)	79(73.2)	108(100)
Forced sex/ rape	20(28.2)	51(71.8)	71(100)
Charmed forced sex	12(52.2)	11(47.8)	23(100)
Someone puts some drugs into your drink to make you sleep and had sex	22(47.8)	24(52.2)	46(100)
Forced termination of pregnancy	7(24.1)	22(75.9)	29(100)
Threats after Sex	41(52.6)	37(47.4)	78(100)
Psychological			
Belittle	107(48.4)	114(51.6)	221(100)

Someone did something to make you feel unhappy	139(51.1)	133(48.9)	272(100)
Threaten to kill	61(50.4)	60(49.6)	121(100)
Humiliate	96(54.2)	81(45.8)	177(100)
Threaten to hurt	73(49.0)	76(51.0)	149(100)
Cyber			
Forced picture of private part	27(32.1)	57(67.9)	84(100)

Table 5 Pattern of Experience of Gender-Based Violence during the Lockdown by types

Violence	Male n=254	Female n=266	Total= 520	χ^2	P-Value
Physical					
No	41(7.88)	52(10)	93(17.9)	1.027	0.311
Yes	213(40.96)	214(54.2)	427(82.1)		
Sexual					
No	148(28.5)	124(23.8)	272(52.3)	7.070	0.008
Yes	106(20.4)	142(57.3)	248(47.7)		
Psychological					
No	87(46.8)	99(53.2)	186(35.8)	0.498	0.481
Yes	167(50.)	167(50.0)	334(64.2)		
Cyber					
No	227(52.1)	209(47.9)	436(83.8)	11.186	0.001
Yes	27(32.1)	57(67.9)	84(16.2)		
Atleast any form of GBV					
No	29(45.3)	35(54.7)	64(12.3)	0.365	0.546
Yes	225(49.3)	231(50.7)	456(87.7)		

Table 3 shows the categorization of the GBV by the acceptance of adolescents. Greater percentage of adolescents (n=315, 60.6%) has high acceptance of gender-based violence. However, it is noteworthy that 187(36%) of the respondents are females. However, a larger proportion (n=126, 24.2%) of those who are considered to have a low gender equitable attitude/acceptance towards gender-based violence are males. As shown in Table 2, gender is significantly associated with attitude/ acceptance of violence by adolescents P=0.000).

As shown in the table 4, a total of four hundred and twenty seven respondent of male and female gender have experienced physical violence. Being kicked, dragged or beaten up was highest among males (n= 143, 56.5%) while Pushing was experienced more among the females. A total of two hundred and forty-eight respondent of male and female gender have experienced sexual violence. For females the highest form of sexual violence was unwanted kiss (n=101, 62.4%) and unwanted touch (n=87, 58.8%). A total of three hundred and thirty four respondent of male and female gender have experienced psychological violence. Being humiliated was highest (n=96, 54.2%) among males while belittling (n=114, 51.6%) was experienced more among the females. Furthermore, a greater percentage of females (n=57, 64.9%) experienced cyber violence more than males (n=27, 32.1%).

Table 5 shows the pattern of gender based violence experienced by adolescents during the pandemic lockdown. Majority of the respondents (n=427, 82.1%) reported to have experience physical form of gender-based violence. Also, incidence of sexual (n=248, 47.7%), psychological (n=334, 64.2%) and cyber form (n=84, 16.2%) of gender-based violence were on the increase during this time period. In all forms of gender-based violence that was experienced by adolescents during this period, females had a higher proportion [physical -n= 217, 41.2%, sexual n = 142, 27.3% &

cyber violence-n= 57, 10.9%] of the forms of GBV except for psychological gender-based violence (n=167, 32.1%) in both gender.

4. Discussion

The respondents for this study were adolescents male and female from both public and private schools in Ibadan north local government area. This findings from this study suggests that adolescents are often vulnerable group that are susceptible to harm and experience a time of difficult transition. Majority n=308, 59.2% of the respondents were Christians and also of the Yoruba's ethnic group (n=451, 86.7%). This findings is corresponding to that of Ajala, R.O [9] also carried out in Ibadan north local government area, Oyo State in which majority of the respondent were Christians and of the Yoruba tribe.

More of the female respondents has high gender equitable attitude compared with the male respondents. In this study, it was found out that the female are notably more supportive of gender equality (n=187, 36%) than the male gender (n=128, 24). The finding in this study is in agreement with a study carried out among adolescent boys and girls in India reporting that adolescent girls significantly hold gender egalitarian attitudes than the boys with a percentage of 64.2% to 45.8%. [10]. This might be because of the way society has treated the female child as to gender norms which brought about the opinion among the girl child that everyone (both male and female) are equal and deserve equal right and opportunities.

A high percentage of adolescents experienced GBV during the pandemic lockdown. There seem to be strong similarity between COVID-19 and other pandemics in the past, owing to the fact that COVID-19 has equally resulted in an increase in cases of domestic violence as previous pandemics did. As noted by Bradbury-Jones and Isham that the imposed lockdown aimed at reducing the spread of the virus allowed abusers to have more freedom to act [11]. Fawole and colleagues previously noted that gender based violence has always been a subject of discussion among adolescents but there was a noticeable surge in its occurrence during the pandemic lockdown [8]. In this study adolescent girls were seen to be at the receiving end of the experience of gender based violence during the pandemic lockdown. This was similar to the findings of Tisane who reported an extreme impact of covid-19 on women and girls who could not escape the severe reality of violence [6]. In this study the prevalent of sexual violence during the pandemic was high. Based on the findings from previous outbreaks such as the Ebola outbreak, sexual violence has always been found to be on increase among adolescents [12]. This experience was found to occur both in male and female. In this study adolescent girls experienced more sexual violence (57.3%) than the boys (42.7%). This findings is in agreement to previous studies. For example during the West African Ebola outbreaks, Onyango and colleague in a study carried out in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone reported that sexual violence was the highest risk of violence among adolescents girls [13]. This could be because of their vulnerability and increased closeness to perpetrators. In this study the commonest form of sexual violence was unwanted kiss and touch which was higher among the adolescent girls. The ideal population of students who experienced sexual forms of violence is likely to be higher as some students might have refuse to tell the experience out of fear of stigma, and shame. Males and females were both vulnerable to sexual violence. It was mostly perpetuated by friends and neighbors.

The surge in the levels of violence during the pandemic may be a reflection of the rising economic uncertainty, substance abuse, and changes to daily family lives which result in increased tensions within households, thereby compounding violent situations [15]. Also, occurrence of religious, ethnic, criminal, and political violence during the lockdown might also have resulted in the spike of the violence situation.

5. Conclusion

Findings from this study revealed the surge in incident of GBV during the pandemic lockdown caused by COVID-19 and especially, home confinement of the adolescents with their parents who demonstrate inter-parental violence acts contribute to their attitude/ acceptance towards violence. We recommend the need for a widespread school-based interventions so as to educate students on how to avoid gender-based violence. Victims also need to be educated on how to cope and where to seek help following abuse in respect to future outbreaks.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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