



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Global Dreams, Local Realities, and Wrinkle Effect on Children's Emotional Well-Being Amid the Parental International Migration

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Oct 15, 2024 Accepted: Dec 22, 2024	This study explores the effect of parental international migration (PIM) on children well-being in Nepal. Through an in-depth analysis of emotions, life satisfaction, companionship, guardianship, and self-reliance, the study uncovers experiences of left-behind children (LBC) in comparison with non-left-behind children (NLBC). The research conducted in various regions of the Kaski district, encompassing all five local bodies were purposefully selected. This study reveals a wide range of emotions in children, from pride in parental sacrifices to feelings of leaving, showcasing their resilience in manage conflicting feelings. Despite parental absence, children maintain stable social bonds, underscoring the impact of individual personalities and external support systems. The study emphasizes the significant influence of guardianship and nurturing on children's well-being, highlighting the vital role of parental connection, even from a distance. Ethical considerations are maintained as participants' responses are represented through codes, with 'L' denoting LBC and 'NL' representing NLBC. Parental presence, particularly mothers, significantly impacts on children's sense of security. These experiences are vital for policymakers, educators, and families, emphasizing the need for tailored support systems that provides a holistic perspective, shed light the weaknesses of parental migration's on children's well-being.
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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, there has been a notable upsurge in international labour migration, particularly from developing countries like Nepal, India, and various South Asian nations (de Haas et al., 2019). Many individuals from these regions have actively sought employment opportunities in foreign labour markets, notably in Gulf countries and beyond (Ministry of Labour, 2022).

This trend of international migration, driven by the forces of globalization and liberalization policies, has presented substantial prospects for economic progress (International Organization for Migration, 2021). Nations such as Nepal have unquestionably reaped rewards from these opportunities. However, as time has passed, the drawbacks of this often-touted 'opportunity' have also become increasingly conspicuous (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2018). Despite the financial inflow in the form of remittances, there is now a gradual acknowledgment of the adverse

psychosocial effects and family disintegration as associated consequences (Katuwal Chhetri et al., 2020).

The origins of Nepalese international labour migration can be linked back to the Sugauli treaty of 1816 when the British began enlisting Nepali Gurkhas to serve in the East India Company (Ferrie & Hatton, 2015). The participation of Nepali individuals in events such as World War I further cemented their involvement on the global scene (Kunwar, 2017). Nonetheless, it was in the mid-1980s that the trend of Nepalese people seeking employment in Gulf states and Malaysia experienced a substantial surge (International Labour Organization, 2018).

The literature on these subject highlights not only the increasing number of absentee workers from Nepal but also the fluctuating statistics concerning Left-behind Children (LBC). It's worth noting that changes in the number of absentee workers are directly correlated with the number of LBC in Nepal (Ministry of Labour, 2022). Furthermore, this connection extends to the growth of remittances, which symbolize increased investments in the education and health of LBC (Idris et al., 2020). The growth of international labour migration, particularly from countries like Nepal and India, has become a topic of significant interest in recent decades. It reflects the aspirations of individuals seeking improved livelihoods and economic opportunities abroad. However, this trend has unfolded with its share of complexities and implications, both positive and negative. One of the principal drivers behind this surge in international migration is the pursuit of better employment prospects. Many individuals from developing countries, including Nepal, have been attracted to labour markets in Gulf countries and other regions. This migration for employment has been facilitated by factors such as globalization and liberalization policies, which have created opportunities for labour mobility (International Organization for Migration, 2019).

From an economic perspective, countries like Nepal have benefited from the remittances sent back by their overseas workers (Sharma, 2023). These remittances can provide a crucial source of income for families and contribute to the national economy (International Organization for Migration, 2021). The inflow of remittances has led to economic improvements in many households and has been a lifeline for communities in the sending countries. However, alongside these economic gains, there have been growing concerns about the social and psychological impact of international migration on families, especially those left behind (Iqbal et al., 2014). As more individuals migrate in search of work, there is a noticeable increase in the number of LBC in their home countries. The well-being and development of these children can be deeply affected by the absence of one or both parents (Khanam & Khan, 2023).

One noteworthy aspect of this migration is its impact on Nepal's demographics. While there is a significant population of absentee workers labouring abroad, the consequences of this migration are also reflected in the number of LBC (Shivakoti, 2022). A direct relationship exists between the two, as the absence of parents due to migration often results in children being left behind. Significantly, the growth of remittances plays a dual role in this context. On one hand, it signifies the financial support flowing into these households, potentially contributing to investments in the education and health of LBC (Simkhada et al., 2017). On the other hand, it underscores the challenges faced by families separated by international migration, including the need to ensure the well-being and development of the children left behind (Zhao et al., 2018).

This study encapsulates the intricate connection between PIM and well-being of children. In a globalized world, many parents seek better opportunities abroad, driven by dreams of economic prosperity and improved living standards. However, these dreams often collide with the local realities their children face, including cultural adjustments, social integration challenges, and the quality of education. It aims to unravel the complexities of this relationship, shedding light on how the aspirations and decisions of migrant parents reverberate through the lives and journeys of their children.

The upswing in PIM for employment opportunities, particularly from countries like Nepal, has transformed the social and economic landscape of both sending and receiving nations. While it has undoubtedly provided economic benefits and opportunities for individuals seeking work abroad, it has also given rise to intricate social and psychological challenges, especially concerning the well-being of LBC. Recognizing the multifaceted impact of international migration is essential for policymakers and researchers as they effort to address the opportunities and challenges associated with this global phenomenon.

The objectives of this study reveal that a wide range of reactions in children, from pride in parental sacrifices to feelings of leaving, showcasing their resilience in manage conflicting feelings with exploring the effect of PIM on their well-being in the context of Nepal.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was initiated with the aim of exploring into the lived experiences of children affected by PIM. Conducted through in-depth interview, these discussions followed a predefined protocol, allowing participants to candidly share their perspectives on the well-being of children in the context of PIM. The study areas encompassed five specific local bodies within the Kaski district, selected purposefully due to their notable migration patterns according based on cluster. Focusing on grade five students, both LBC and NLBC, their parents and school teachers and head teachers the sampling process ensured diverse representation across schools and clusters. In altogether 10 students, 10 parents, five teachers and five head teachers were chosen representing each cluster within the Kaski district. Each category was represented by two student, two parents and one teacher as well as one head teacher from five distinct region as cluster: Pokhara Metropolitan City, Madi Rural Municipality, Annapurna Rural Municipality, Machhapuchhere Rural Municipality, and Rupa Rural Municipality. It has guaranteed a balanced and comprehensive exploration of the experiences of both LBC and NLBC across different local bodies, enriching the study's depth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study's focus on understanding how children respond to PIM. Researchers delve into this area by analyzing children's emotions through the emotional spectrum, representing a different aspect of their well-being. By analyzing the information through emotional spectrum, it aims to unravel the diverse effects of parental migration on children well-being. This emotional spectrum provides valuable insights, painting a clear picture of the impact of migration on well-being of LBC.

Children left behind by migrating parents experience a wide array of emotions. Their parents' decision to seek employment abroad is often viewed as an act of sacrifice, a testament to their commitment to providing for the family. This perception imbues children with a sense of pride and admiration for their parents. Yet, these positive sentiments are often compared with the emotional turmoil of separation. Resilience theory offers a valuable framework for understanding this emotional spectrum (Hill et al., 2007). It recognizes that children's ability to navigate these conflicting emotions is central to their resilience. Children draw a strength from their parents' dedication, using it as a source of motivation to excel in their studies. Some of them grapples with feelings of abandonment and loss, requiring additional support to cope with their parents' absence. The children emotional spectrum is presented in figure 1.

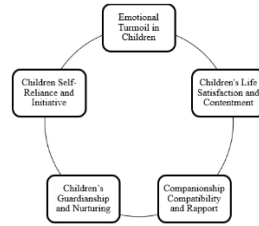


Figure 1: Emotional Spectrum

Figure 1 presents that, LBC, often facing emotional turmoil, experience a range of emotions due to parental absence (Bailen et al., 2019). Emotional instability can affect their companionship compatibility and rapport with peers (Wikle et al., 2019). Their life satisfaction and contentment are challenged, seeking solace in nurturing environments. Guardianship and nurturing become paramount, filling the emotional void left by absent parents (Diehl et al., 2011). Encouraging self-reliance and initiative empowers these children, fostering resilience amidst adversity (Masten & Barnes, 2018). The emotional spectrum of LBC underscores the need for empathetic support, stable companionship, and strong guardianship, all crucial elements in helping them navigate life's challenges and develop into emotionally balanced, self-reliant individuals.

Emotional Turmoil in Children

Emotional turmoil encompass various challenging circumstances and adversities that can significantly impact a child's outlook and resilience (Masten & Barnes, 2018). Children share their experiences, acknowledging that parental international migration (PIM) brings about feelings of unhappiness, loneliness, anxiety, and more. However, they also note that it helps fulfil their daily necessities and luxuries. The fulfilment of basic requirements contributes to their well-being. So, PIM has nothing to do with psychological traits. PL1 shares, I shoulder the responsibility of both the parents myself because my wife has been on abroad almost for more than five years. I take care of the children. Parents remembered that sometimes the children miss their mother, however; they don't think it affects children's education and well-being.

In this study explored, how children coped with their mother's departure for overseas work during the childhood period. Back then, as a young child, children was oblivious to the intricacies of family matters. Children's father supported them by saying that her mother had gone to visit her own family for a short period and would be back soon. At that moment, the children didn't experience much emotional turmoil. However, as child grew older, she gained a deeper understanding of the reasons behind her mother's departure, and it left them feeling sorrowful about her absence. Zhong et al. (2020) claims that, parental international migration initially led to a child's goodness and lack of empathetic, but as they matured, it resulted in feelings of unhappiness and longing for their absent parent. From this type of experiences, it can be said childhood experience of LBC's mother's overseas employment was initially met with a child's innocence and lack of understanding, but as they matured, they came to appreciate the complexities of the situation, which ultimately led to feelings of sadness and longing for their mother.

The LBC believe that proper care and support from home can minimize the negative effects of PIM (Sharma, 2023; Vijayshri & Farooqi, 2014). However, they also acknowledge that PIM has significant implications for children's psychological well-being, leading to feelings of aloneness, sadness, anxiety, and upset. Representing from the non-left-behind children (NLBC), NL2 mentions a situation where a family member falls ill, and they don't have enough money for treatment, leading them to believe that having one parent abroad could have prevented this situation. Nonetheless, NL3 notes that PIM has helped many families meet their daily needs and demands.

NL4 believes that their upbringing remains unaffected by PIM because they are aware of their responsibilities. PNL1 and PNL3 said that those parents who are in foreign employment earn more money and can fulfil their family requirements. However, they emphasize the importance of continuous emotional support and contact from their parents, regardless of their physical presence. L5 mentions occasional feelings of aloneness and sadness when their parents are absent, while L4 notes that these feelings are more pronounced when they are sick. NL5, on the other hand, suggests that understanding their parents' absence is due to financial needs helps them overcome feelings of low self-esteem. The improved financial status resulting from PIM can lead to economic comfort and stability, ultimately contributing to long-term family happiness (Tong et al., 2019).

It is claimed that children's well-being is closely tied to their resilience in the context of parental migration. They recognize the diverse impact of PIM, which can lead to both negative psychological effects and improved financial stability. Teachers' claimed that the children, mostly from the community school, they belong to lower socio-economic classes, so their well-being and academic performances are comparatively lower whether they belong to LBC or NLBC. The teachers (T4 and T1) feel that those children who have their parents on abroad seem like orphan. With their dress up, daily habits, educational performance and health status they can be easily identified whether they are LBC or NLBC. These children often go through aloneness, sadness, anxiety, irritation, upset, etc. However, they emphasize that with proper parental care, communication, and support, the negative psychological impact can be minimized, underscoring the importance of a supportive environment for children's well-being.

Children's Life Satisfaction and Contentment

Life satisfaction of children sheds light on their well-being and overall development (Ruggeri et al., 2020). Understanding how children evaluate their own contentment with life, encompassing factors like familial relationships, parental presence or absence, and emotional experiences, provides invaluable insights into their emotional and psychological resilience. Analyzing their perspectives on what contributes to their life satisfaction can lead to a deeper understanding of the factors that shape their attitudes, relationships, and academic performance.

The life satisfaction of children is reflected through their personal experiences and perceptions (Sharma, 2023). L2 expresses that they would have been more satisfied if their mother were with them. Despite their mother's regular financial support and the fulfilment of necessities, they admit to feeling unhappy during her absence. However, they acknowledge they have no alternatives but to wait for her return.

Children expressed that their feelings about not being satisfied in the absence of their parents. Yet, they also recognize that their parents' absence contributes to the fulfilment of their daily requirements (Mao et al., 2020). Over time, they have learned to enjoy online conversations and telephonic communication with parents living abroad. L1 shares their experience of their father shouldering dual responsibilities in their mother's absence. Their father's deep concern and regular guidance in their studies (Louca & Omari, 2020), including school visits for feedback, have made them feel the absence of their mother has almost no effect on their study and overall life affairs.

Father's job abroad provides financial stability, and communication tools keep the family connected, minimizing challenges. The focus is on the mother's household management, ensuring the child's well-being and improving their quality of life (Phuyal, 2020). While, L3, opines that, whose father works abroad, they don't face any problems because their mother takes care of everything. They have everything they need, and their life is better than most kids because their mother pays a lot of attention to their education and health (Mao et al., 2020). There is a difference in life satisfaction between LBC and NLBC (Song et al., 2018). NL5 expresses longing for the facilities and availability that LBC possess. Conversely, some LBC, like L4, express that they wish their absent parent, in this

case, their father, were present to enjoy their parenthood. Children believe that they could have done better in various aspects if their parents were there with them.

Children typically think that having a loving and nurturing mother can make up for the father's absence in the family, reducing its impact on overall life satisfaction (Okorn et al., 2022). One of the children L5 expresses a sense of deprivation of love and affection from their parents and wishes they were present in Nepal to improve their quality of life. PNL2 and PL9 opine that parents of LBC have better knowledge and resources. They can manage the basic requirements of their children, so LBC have better opportunities. PNL4 says, since we live in our own country, we do not have education and awareness. We must work from dawn to dusk, so we don't have time to spend with the children. I think the parents of LBC have much more money and resources than us.

This suggests that a child could make more progress in the presence of their parents. However, NL1 shares that in some situations, they feel agitated when their parents shout at them and question why they hadn't gone abroad, indicating that parental presence isn't always straightforward in influencing life satisfaction (Du et al., 2023). NL3 and NL2 have similar experiences, suggesting that the dynamics of parental presence and its effects on life satisfaction can vary. The teachers believe that there is no difference between LBC and NLBC regarding parental absence rather it depends on how they behave with their children.

So, it can say that, the effect of PIM on the life satisfaction of children is multifaceted. Children recognize that their daily needs are met through PIM but also experience feelings of sorrow for their parents' absence. In such cases, the presence of the father appears to play a vital role in ensuring the children's well-being. This complexity underscores the need for a holistic understanding of children's experiences in various migration contexts when assessing their well-being.

Companionship Compatibility and Rapport

Children's perspectives on well-being and resilience in the context of PIM reveal numerous insights. This implies that the children's interactions with friends and colleagues appear to be minimally impacted by their parents' international migration, suggesting that their social relationships outside the family remain relatively stable despite the absence of their parents (Demir, 2015). L2 highlights their experience of missing their father due to his absence at home, even though he regularly sends money. NL2 and NL5 also share that the absence of their parents in the family has either no effect or a minimal effect on their relationships with friends and colleagues. PL3 share that children living with their parents have less chance to mix up with the wrong mates since their parents monitor them regularly and take notice of their activities. But in the case of LBC, they lack proper care and monitoring. So, they do not have anybody to ask and guide them further. With this view, we are doing all efforts to guide and monitor our children properly. However, they collectively express a sense of something missing from their childhood due to their parents' absence. L4 feels deprived of memorable moments with her father.

Participants (L3 and NL4) emphasize that in the absence of the father, the mother often takes on the responsibility of the entire family, managing household affairs while also caring for the children's education and other activities. L4 and NL1 mention that proper care and inspiration from their mothers have motivated them to perform better in their studies. NL4 believes that her good academic performance has left a positive impression on their friends. Children share the experience related to their relationships with others, such as their helping attitude, mutual trust, sharing secrets, inviting friends' home, being a good partner, providing company when alone, comforting each other in difficult times, and more (Delgado et al., 2022). Interestingly, these perceptions are similar among both LBC and NLBC, suggesting that these aspects of their friendships are not significantly affected by PIM. T1 opines, LBC have behaviour problems in general. Since they do not have to live under the restrictions in the family, they expect similar tendencies in school as well. Lack of proper socialization

and guidance from family, LBC lack social behaviour. Often people complain on disciplinary problems in them.

Children reflect on their parents' absence, expressing sadness and a sense of longing (Mao et al., 2020). L5 share that they also feel jealous when they see other children walking with their fathers. L1 shares that they believe they would have more confidence and compatibility with friends if their parents were present. Children express missing the love and affection of their parents during their absence (Delgado et al., 2022). L4 compares NLBC, suggesting that NLBC appear to be more confident and friendlier than LBC, possibly indicating the influence of parental presence. Despite the emotional impact of their parents' absence, children's relationships with friends and colleagues do not seem to be significantly affected. They maintain positive attitudes, trust, and mutual support among their peers (Wang & Hu, 2021). This suggests that the compatibility and interpersonal dynamics among children are influenced more by individual personalities and the support they receive from friends and teachers, rather than the absence of parents.

Children's Guardianship and Nurturing

Guardianship is a critical aspect of understanding their well-being and resilience (Ruggeri et al., 2020). Children themselves evaluate the support and care they receive from parents, schools, and their communities offers valuable insights into their emotional development and overall life satisfaction (Grossmann & Grossmann, 2019). From the participants perspectives; L5 and NL2 emphasize that having both parents together would provide them with crucial support, including better income and resources for their daily needs. Study justifies that, if both parents are abroad, they would face numerous difficulties. However, L3 shares that the absence of mothers appears to have a more significant impact than the absence of fathers.

Studies explore how children perceive the roles and responsibilities of various caregivers, including the impact of parental migration on their sense of security and emotional needs (Song et al., 2018). NLBC express grievances despite living with their parents, as they do not feel adequately supported. Though the parents of NLBC seem satisfied with being together with their children, they sound deprived of economic resources. They think that if they had gone abroad, they would also have economic resources for the children. PNL5 said, the family of LBC has better income, so we also wish to go abroad. But we are often caught in dilemma that if we go abroad our children may not get proper care. Though, we would have better opportunity to spend on our children, they may not get proper care and nurture. NL1 reveals that their parents do not pay attention to their homework completion, do not believe in their success, and lack emotional attachment and affection. It also underscores the importance of assessing children's perspectives to create a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to their resilience and healthy development, particularly in the context of family dynamics and migration (Iqbal et al., 2014).

Interestingly, LBC receive guidance and support from their parents even when they are abroad, leveraging various communication tools such as telephone, video calls, messenger apps, and more. This demonstrates that parental involvement and support can be maintained even when physical presence is lacking, emphasizing the importance of parental willpower. T2 says, concerning to discipline, social behaviour, sanitation and other activities, LBC seem to require more orientation. T5 further explains such oddities have direct reflections on their academic performance as well. This does not necessarily mean that NLBC have better academic performance. It depends on the family background as well as the socialization.

Children recognize the role of teachers in providing support and motivation for their studies (Wang & Hu, 2021). L1 acknowledges the teachers' support in school, describing how they motivate and inspire students to excel. L2 highlights the supportive nature of the community, where people show concern for the children's education and overall well-being. NL5 also praises the teachers for their

assistance in both studies and classwork. Children do have certain expectations, such as a desire for teachers to teach in the Nepali medium. The children stress the importance of parental presence for support, collaborative efforts, and access to better resources (Wehmeyer et al., 2017). However, they also acknowledge that absent parents abroad can still guide and support them effectively, underscoring the idea that physical presence is not always essential for providing necessary support.

Children Self-Reliance and Initiative

Self-reliance offer valuable insights into their emotional development and resilience (Caçador Anastácio, 2016). This study explores that how children initiate and engage in self-assertive behaviours, such as taking leadership roles, solving problems, and displaying empathy, provides a deeper understanding of their interpersonal dynamics and attitudes toward helping others. Participant (L2) expresses a belief that migration for the sole purpose of earning money, which is then spent on luxuries, may not be necessary. Similarly, the participants (NL1 and NL5) suggest that having the father work regularly while the mother manages the home could lead to happier living.

The presence of parents significantly enhances children's self-assertiveness. L3 believes that having both parents at home would have facilitated greater progress in their studies. PNL10 and PL2 further add that they can advocate for their rights and actively participate in decision-making processes, fostering healthy relationships based on mutual respect. Furthermore, they actively engage in classroom discussions, seek clarification and are comfortable to seek help from teachers or peers. In contrast, NLBC may rely more on their parents and struggle to take responsibility. Teachers are found to be with different opinion. Study found that PIM in terms of family disintegration while the arguments also replicates in terms of availability of resources. Some see it as harmful to children and other as beneficial. In this regard most of them agree that PIM allows to have much economic access to families. T5 shares with financial access families have resources to spend for their children, however; these children lack cooperativeness and self-assertion.

Study highlights the influence of parental presence or absence, especially in the context of PIM, on their proactive intuitiveness and self-confidence (Schwab et al., 2021). Exploring these perceptions illuminates the multifaceted nature of self-assertiveness in children, showcasing how it is shaped by their experiences, relationships, and individual personalities (Sharma et al., 2021). This study participants (L5) shares the sentiment that parental presence would have allowed them to learn many things and have more time for social activities. The absence of parental support is seen as a deprivation (Louca & Al Omari, 2020). This understanding contributes to a more holistic assessment of children's well-being and their capacity to adapt and thrive in various circumstances. From the children's perspective, those whose parents have migrated express a longing for their parents to return and live together with them. They acknowledge that they cannot determine whether their parents' migration was a compulsion or a choice.

Remarkably, proactive intuitiveness, the ability to empathize with others, seek to help, and solve problems, is found to be common among both LBC and NLBC (Schoeps et al., 2020). Study shows that, PIM does not appear to have a significant impact on this trait. NL3 expresses empathy for people in sorrow and actively seeks ways to help them. This shows that parental migration does not diminish children's intuitive pro-activeness. L4 actively helps their mother with daily chores, feeling it's their responsibility since their father is abroad. L1 longs for their parents' return, believing it would enhance their freedom and social engagement thus fostering traits of proactive intuitiveness, such as empathy and helping others. Basically, children's well-being is closely tied to their resilience in the face of parental migration, with a specific focus on parental migration (Zhao et al., 2018). Study emphasize the importance of parental presence for enhanced self-assertiveness and well-being but also demonstrate the resilience to maintain proactive intuitiveness, regardless of parental migration (Scannell, 2021). This suggests that mother migration is not inherently less acceptable than father

migration in terms of its impact on children's well-being, as the effects are multifaceted and influenced by individual circumstances and support systems.

CONCLUSION

This study illuminates the dynamics of PIM on children's well-being, emphasizing the pivotal role of emotional support, parental presence, and community engagement. Despite the economic advantages, the emotional toll on LBC is profound, leading to complex emotional spectra ranging from pride to sorrow. While financial stability is achieved through remittances, the absence of parents triggers feelings of longing, sadness, and occasional jealousy. However, amidst these challenges, children exhibit extraordinary resilience, demonstrating proactive intuitiveness, empathy, and adaptability. It underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of migration's impact, advocating for comprehensive support systems, empathetic guardianship, and stable companionship to bolster the emotional well-being of these children. Policymakers and communities must recognize the multifaceted nature of children's experiences and work collaboratively to provide holistic support, ensuring that their emotional and psychological needs are met, thus fostering a generation of resilient and self-reliant individuals in the face of parental migration's challenges.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Asst. Prof. Sushil Sharma, PhD: Study conception and design, analysis and interpretation of data, manuscript preparation of the manuscript, approved the final version of the manuscript.

Prof. Bhimsen Devkota, PhD: Study conception and design, supervision, review the manuscript critically, approved the final version of the manuscript.

Prof. Surendra Giri, PhD: Study conception, review the manuscript critically, approved the final version of the manuscript.

Asst. Prof. Devaraj Acharya, PhD: Study conception, review the manuscript critically, approved the final version of the manuscript.

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