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Mapping of scientific literature on respectful maternity care and obstetric violence

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Abstract

Disrespectful and abusive care in public healthcare facilities is one of the main reasons that women tend to deny access public health care facilities. This study tries to appraise the present trends of research on respectful maternity care in public health care facilities around the world. Bibliometric analysis of research articles published during 2013-2023 and indexed in PubMed was done to this purpose. The Dimension database was used to extract PubMed data and the VosViewer was used for the data visualization. The highest number of 104 research articles respectful maternity care got published in 2022. Articles published in 2018 got the highest number of 1649 citations followed by 1342 in 2019, 1325 in 2016, 1236 in 2017, 1037 in 2020, and 883 in 2015. Among the top ten most influential countries the United States topped the list with 117 publications, followed by United Kingdom, Ethiopia, Australia, Canada, jointly Ghana and Tanzania, Netherlands, Switzerland and Sweden with 54, 45, 42, 31, 19, 13 and 11 articles respectively. The World Health Organizations (WHO) had been the most influential organization with 1738 citations for only 12 published articles. It had the huge citation impact of 144.83%. WHO was followed by London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, Harvard University and London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine with citation impact of 99.8%, 89.56% and 81.65% respectively.

Keywords: Respectful maternity care (RMC), maternal mortality, white ribbon alliance for safe motherhood, universal rights of childbearing women

Introduction

Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) embeds human rights to care given to women during pregnancy, childbirth and in postnatal care. It ensures elimination of obstetric violence and promotes maternal care with dignity, compassion, and compassion (White Ribbon Alliance, 2011) [8]. WHO estimated in 2020 that approximately 800 women died every day during labor. It means almost 2,87,000 women died in 2020 alone during pregnancy, labor and childbirth and 95% of them was from low and lower-middle income countries. Most of them could have been saved because they died from pregnancy related complications which were mostly preventable and treatable. All it was required that they should have been provided only quality care delivered respectfully following the guidelines and recommendation by WHO (WHO, 2021).

In consideration with the fact mentioned above respectful delivery of quality maternal care became an issue of global concern. When RMC first came into existence in the early 2000s, its primary goal was to stop women from being mistreated or harmed while giving birth. WHO's recommendation on "Prevention and Elimination of Disrespect and Abuse During Facility-Based Delivery" played a vital role in bringing this issue to light and emphasized how crucial it was to treat women with respect during childbirth (WHO, 2015).

"The Respectful Maternity Care: The Universal Rights of Childbearing Women" campaign, run by the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood, was introduced in 2010 with the goal of promoting RMC as a fundamental human right for all women. This campaign brought together a coalition of organizations, advocates, and health professionals to make people increasingly aware of the need for RMC and to promote changes in policy and practise to enable its implementation (WHO, 2011).

Reduction of maternal mortality rate (MMR) has always been an important agenda for every nation. SDG 2030 aims to reduce MMR <70/100,000. Every country has been trying hard to

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achieve this target and accordingly implementing different plans and programmes in the national health system. Emphasis has been given to motivate mothers to deliver in public health facilities where skilled birth attendants will take care of the mothers during labor. Despite this, low-income countries are still very far from the target set by SDG 2030. Disrespectful and abusive care is one of the main reasons that women tend to deny access public health care facilities and consequently MMR <70/100,000 by 2030 seems unachievable (Lee *et al.*, 2016)^[2].

Nurse midwives are one of the most important stakeholders in health care services. In maternal healthcare services, they can make a woman's birth experience a happy one and consequently empower and comfort them. They can contribute to the global effort to reduce maternal mortality. But at times they may also inflict damage and feel devastated emotionally with disrespectful care which is an important barrier to the use of skilled care given in facilities during childbirth. Respectful care or disrespectful care largely depends on knowledge and challenges in the practice of respectful maternity care that protects women from mistreatments including verbal abuse, physical abuse, disrespect, and discrimination based on cast, creed, and socio-economic status; and gives them their rights to have complete information to empower them making an informed choice about her pregnancy and delivery.⁶ There is research evidence of increasing obstetric violence around the world. Research reports revealed that almost all sorts of mistreatment right from the arrival in the labor room to childbirth were experienced by women. Women were seldom cordially greeted on their arrival to labor room. It has been a very common experience for all laboring women in facilities. Extreme forms of mistreatment like physical violence and abusive or sexist comments from care providers were also reported (Mayra *et al.* 2022)^[5].

Review of Literature

Most of the researches which are being carried out on RMC throughout developed and developing countries deal with the knowledge, attitude, and practice of RMC by midwives or clinicians. Some studies assess the laboring mother's knowledge of RMC. However, very small number of literature is available on mapping RMC research globally. Fernandez-Diaz and Gonzalez-Sanz (2022)^[1] studied the production of scientific literature on obstetric violence which refers to disrespect and abuse done to laboring women during the gynaecological process. They extracted 39 documents published in Spanish-American journals dealing with obstetric violence. The researchers analyzed bibliometrics indicators like publication year, and authorship pattern, most productive nations etc (Fernández-Díaz & González-Sanz, 2022)^[1]. They found increasing scientific production on Hispanic journals. Mexico was most productive nation on obstetric violence. Training to the healthcare professionals was proposed to be the best possible solution

Santos, GV dos *et al* (2022)^[7] mapped the output of scientific literature on obstetric violence in Brazilian nursing research from 2016 to 2021 in providing perinatal care. The researchers retrieved 39 studies. The Nursing Journal emerged relevant to the topic of discussion. 12 authors contributed the most. The most frequent terms used in the article reviewed were obstetric violence, obstetric intervention, gender violence, institutional violence,

violence against women and harmful practices (Santos *et al.*, 2022)^[7].

Liu, YJ *et al.* (2023) conducted a bibliometric study to systematically characterize scientific studies on dignity in nursing. They derived 1429 research papers in this regard from the Web of Science Core Collection from 2011 to 2020. They found that there had been a steady increase in research on this topic around the world. The USA was found on top of the list of nations involved in this research with 336 articles. King's College of London produced the highest number of articles on said topics and Nursing Ethics was the most preferred journal among the researchers (Liu *et al.*, 2022)^[3].

After an exhaustive literature search, no other literature focusing specifically on bibliometric analysis was found. However, a lot of literature are there that give us insight into the research trends and gaps in this area of maternal health care.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the research trend in the area of Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) as observed from the research articles indexed in PubMed from 2012 to 2023?
2. Which are the most preferred journals for publishing research articles on RMC?
3. Which country produced the highest number of research articles on RMC?
4. What are the authorship and collaborative patterns on RMC research?

Methodology

Relevant data on RMC was extracted from the Dimensions database which has brought "thousands of data silos together in one linked data set" for the scientific community that designs research strategy and manages innovation. Data extracted from this database can be easily used for bibliometric analysis. The search query for the extraction of data was limited to article titles and abstracts published during 2010 to 2023 and indexed in PubMed. The researchers used the following search query to keep the data exhaustive and relevant to the research questions:

"Respectful Maternity Care" OR "Humanized Obstetric Care" OR "Obstetric Violence" OR "Disrespect and Abuse in Maternity Care" OR "Dignity in Maternity Care"

Altogether 514 records were extracted on 10 November 2023. After careful reading of all the abstracts available in English language, irrelevant records were eliminated. For the sake of achieving consistency and accuracy of data, the differences found in the names of affiliated institutions, authors, source titles and countries, were combined. Finally, 437 records were studied to answer the research questions. MS Excel and VOSviewer software were used for data analysis and visualization.

Analysis and Interpretation

Growth and trends of RMC Research

Figure 1 presents the publication and citation trend of RMC research between 2013 and 2023. It shows a gradual increase in the publication of research articles on RMC. In 2013 only two research articles were found to be indexed in PubMed. However, it received a good number of 43 citations. Since 2013 there has been consistent growth of research publication in the current topic of research. Starting

from just two articles indexed in 2013 the number amounted to 104 in 2022. However, it dropped down to 76 till November 2023. The published research articles during 2014 and 2020 were found to be very impactful to the researchers since they frequently cited these researches in their articles. Articles published in 2018 and indexed in PubMed got the highest number of 1649 citations followed by 1342 in 2019, 1325 in 2016, 1236 in 2017, 1037 in 2020, and 883 in 2015. But then there was a gradual decrease in

terms of the citations the published articles received, though there were increasing numbers of publications. This, probably was an indication to the degrading quality of published articles or to the lack of funding for research which might have forced the researchers to publish their findings in offline journals normally having article no processing charges (APC). So, for the lack of wider accessibility there was reduced citation for their research.

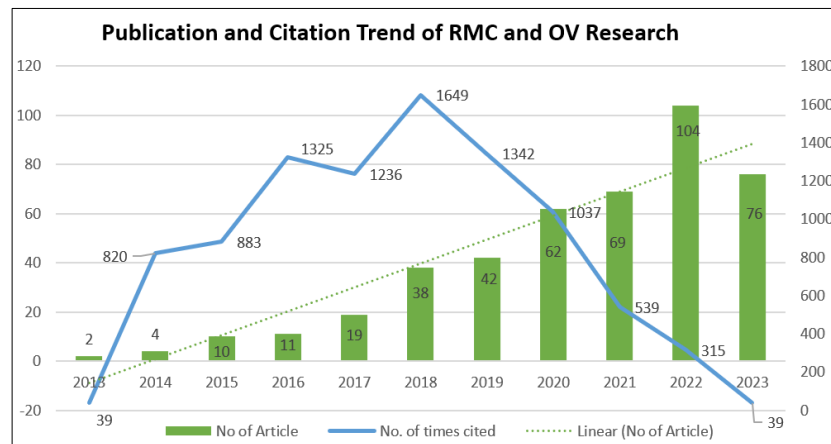


Fig 1: Publication and citation trend of RMC and OV Research

Ten most influential countries

During 2013-2023 research on RMC and OV was going on in sixty-two countries. 23 countries meet the threshold provided there were a minimum of five documents and a minimum of one citation. But, only ten most influential countries have been listed here. As far as the number of publications is concerned the United States topped the list with 117 publications, followed by United Kingdom,

Ethiopia, Australia, Canada, jointly Ghana and Tanzania, Netherlands, Switzerland and Sweden with 54, 45, 42, 31, 19, 13 and 11 articles respectively. But if the citations are counted the United States again topped the table with 5343 citations followed by Switzerland, United Kingdom, Ethiopia, Sweden, Canada, Tanzania, Australia, Ghana and Netherlands with 1742, 1732, 1053, 938, 859, 854, 694, and 241 citations respectively.

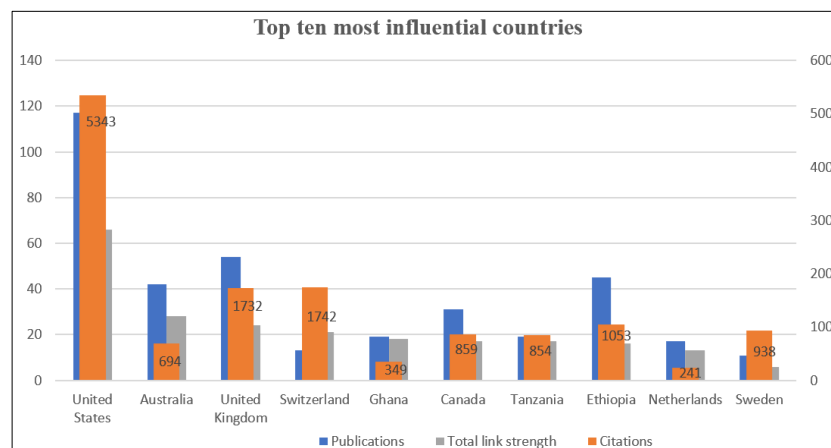


Fig 2: Top 10 most influential countries

Country	Publication	Citation	Total link strength
United States	117	5343	66
Australia	42	694	28
United Kingdom	54	1732	24
Switzerland	13	1742	21
Ghana	19	349	18
Canada	31	859	17
Tanzania	19	854	17
Ethiopia	45	1053	16
Netherlands	17	241	13
Sweden	11	938	6

Figure 3 shows the productivity of research articles by the top ten nations and collaboration among them. The size of nodes indicates the productivity of articles and the thickness of edges (link lines) indicates the strength of connections. The larger the size of the node is, the stronger the influence in terms of the productivity of research articles and the

thicker the link lines are stronger the connection. So, in the given figure the United States are the most influential country in terms of research productivity and, it has the highest connection strength with Tanzania, followed by Ghana and Canada.

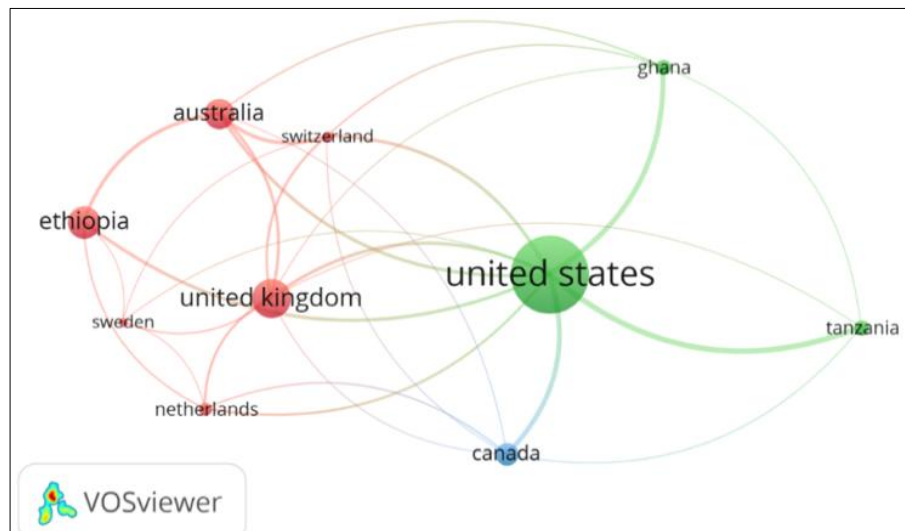


Fig 3: Network among most influential countries

Highly Influential Organizations

Out of total 719 organizations 171 meet the threshold when minimum two documents and at least one citation for an organization were considered. But, here only top ten organizations have been presented in Figure 3. The World Health Organizations (WHO) topped the list with 1738

citations for only 12 published articles. It had the huge citation impact of 144.83%. WHO was followed by London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, Harvard University and London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine with citation impact of 99.8%, 89.56% and 81.65% respectively.

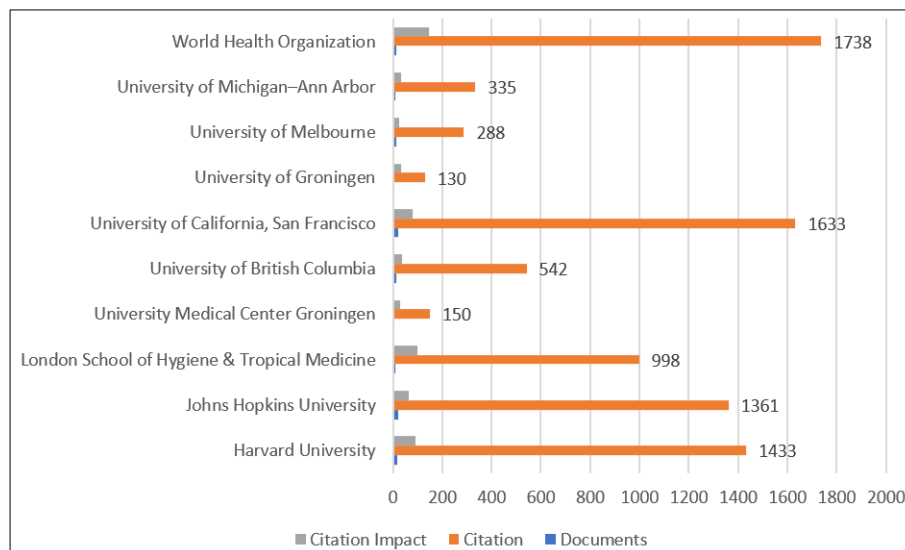


Fig 4: Highly Influential Organizations

Organizations	Documents	Citation	Citation Impact
World Health Organization	12	1738	144.83
London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine	10	998	99.8
Harvard University	16	1433	89.56
University of California, San Francisco	20	1633	81.65
Johns Hopkins University	21	1361	64.8
University of British Columbia	15	542	36.13
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	10	335	33.5
University of Groningen	4	130	32.5
University Medical Center Groningen	5	150	30
University of Melbourne	12	288	24

Authorship and Citation Pattern

It is very crucial to understand authorship pattern for the analysis of research output and collaboration dynamics. The current data extracted from PubMed database presents a diverse range of authorship configuration across different publications. It has been found that there is a minimum of one author to maximum of 65 authors for a single article title. The most used authorship pattern is three authors which produced 67 articles which have been cited 1187 times. Four authors collaboration produced 65 articles which received the highest number of 1560 citations. Five and six

authors collaboration also produced 62 and 53 research articles respectively. These articles have proved influential as they have received 876 and 1465 citations respectively. The publication of 36 articles with single authorship pattern indicates that a significant number of independent research are being carried out. 854 citations for 36 articles refer to the quality of the research and their influence in RMC research. Presence of one article with 14 to 65 authors collaboration indicate that large collaborative teams exist but they are less common. This indicates that complex research topics are tackled by large team.

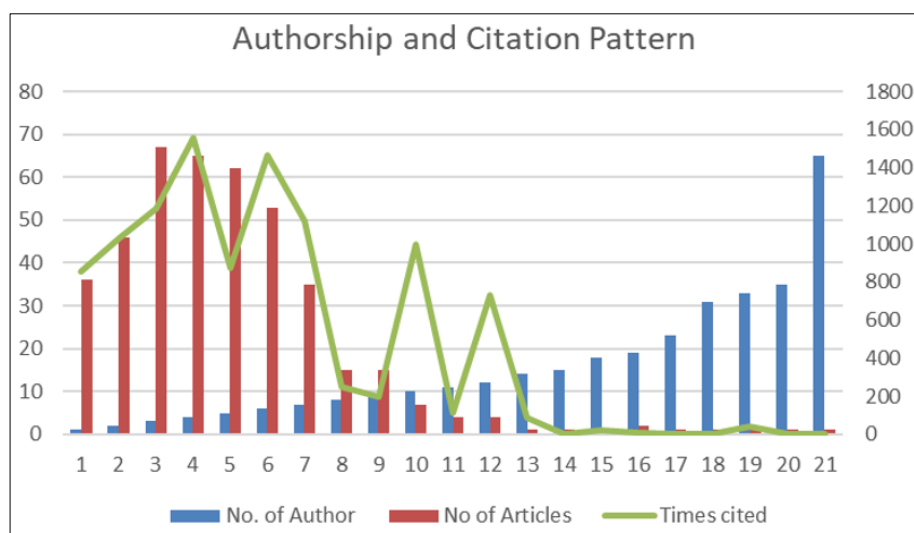


Fig 5: Authorship Pattern and Citation Impact

On average, 5 authors contributed for each research article which indicated a strong collaborative research trend in the area of RMC. In case of citation impact, on average 25 citations were received by a single article indicating a good impact level. According to Subramanyam's Formula ($C = \frac{Nm}{Nm + Ns}$ where, Nm = Number of multi-authored

papers, and Ns = Number of single-authored papers) 91% papers were found to be multi-authored which referred to the highly collaborative research environment in current research topic.

Highly Influential Research Journals

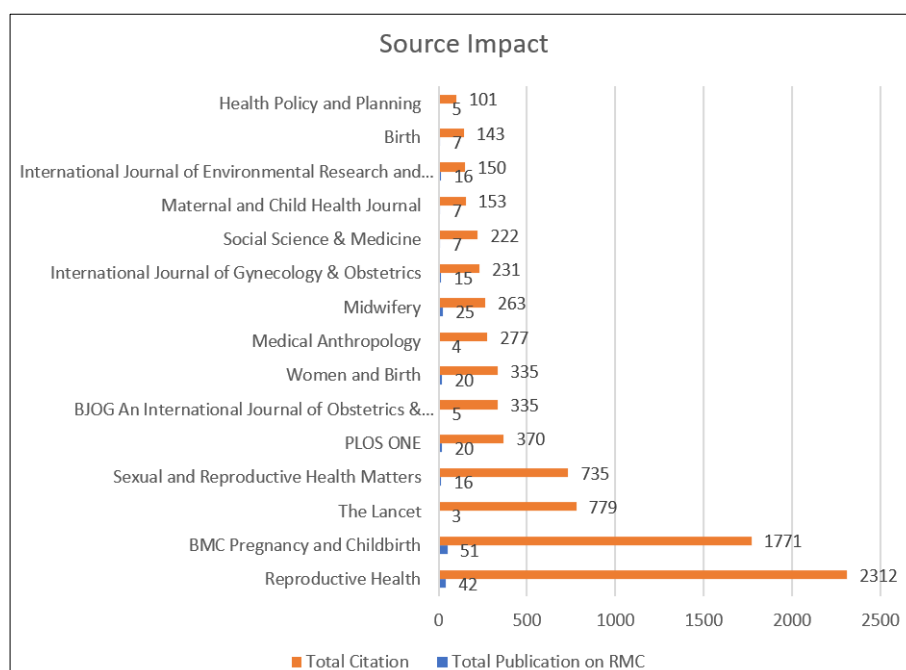


Fig 6: Top Influential Research Journals on RMC

Based on the number of citations received Reproductive Health from BMC, United Kingdom leads with 2312 citations which indicates its dominant influence in the field of RMC research. BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth published by BMC, UK also shows its influence in the current topic of research with 1771 citations. The Lancet, published by Elsevier, UK has fewer publications in its credit, but 779 citations for only 3 publication shows a high citation per article impact. Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters (16 publications), PLOS One (20 publications), Women and Birth (20 publications) and Midwifery (25 publications) are also major sources of RMC research. They show their influence with 735, 370, 335 and 263 citations respectively. BJOG An International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, and Medical Anthropology have fewer publications but they received significant number of 335 and 227 citations respectively emphasizing dominance of quality over quantity.

Discussion

The current study shows a fascinating growth pattern on the publication of research articles on RMC and OV. As the year advanced the number of publications also increased. A consistent growth in publication was noticed since 2013. But after 2022 number significantly dropped from 104 to 76 in November 2023. The findings of the current study contradict with that of the findings of Fernandez-Diaz and Gonzalez-Sanz (2022) ^[1] where they noticed a consistent increase in publication. Articles published during 2014 to 2020 had great impact among the researchers and got huge number of citations. The United States was the most influential country followed by the United Kingdom, Ethiopia, Australia, Canada, jointly Ghana and Tanzania, Netherlands, Switzerland and Sweden in terms of productivity of research publications on the current topic of research. In terms of research network and collaboration the United States had the highest connection strength with Tanzania, followed by Ghana and Canada. WHO became the most influential organization with 1738 (citation impact 144.83%) citations for only 12 research articles followed by followed by London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, Harvard University and London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. It was found that there was a minimum of one author to maximum of 65 authors for a single article title. The most used authorship pattern was three authors which produced 67 articles which were cited 1187 times. Reproductive Health from BMC, United Kingdom was the most influential journal with 2312 citations indicating its dominant influence in the field of RMC research.

Limitation

This study is based on the data derived from Dimension Database only as the researchers have no access to Scopus or Web of Science. So, there is every chance to miss some important publications which might result in different trends of research on the current topic.

Conclusion

The study undertaken aimed at quantifying the scientific output on RMC and OV indexed in PubMed through a bibliometric review. Evidence from the published literature showed a fascinating growth pattern of scientific literature on the current topic. During the 2013-2022 there was an

increasing trend in publication on this topic. But after 2022 number of papers declined. But maintenance of dignity in maternal care will remain equally relevant in all ages whether it is in developed countries or in underdeveloped countries because the improvement of maternal and newborn outcomes is of utmost importance. The United States showed a strong research collaboration with Tanzania, Ghana and Canada. WHO was the most influential organization in terms of quality research on RMC and OV. The USA and WHO should develop collaborative networks to extend research collaboration among the underdeveloped nations to ensure safe and dignified maternal and newborn health outcomes.

Conflict of Interest

Not available.

Financial Support

Not available.

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