



# Integrating pastoral care and appreciative inquiry for sex trafficking survivors: A framework for healing



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Integrating appreciative inquiry (AI) and pastoral care may help address the complex issues of commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. This article explores the benefits of incorporating AI principles into pastoral care for survivors of commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. Commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking involve exploitation, degradation, and violence, making them complex issues. By understanding the sex trade, we can recognise that prostitution is an act of exploitation. Some scholars believe that prostitution and human trafficking are interconnected, with a focus on exploiting the poor, especially women and children. Commercial sexual exploitation can cause mental, emotional, and spiritual distress. Survivors require comprehensive aftercare to address their spiritual, self-esteem, and dignity needs. Organisational development-based AI is constructive and strength-based. Appreciative inquiry promotes positive development, community and individual strength, and resilience by re-contextualizing narratives and envisioning brighter futures. The use of AI could improve pastoral care and holistic rehabilitation. Pastoral caregivers using AI can promote reconciliation, development, and rehabilitation. Using strengths-based strategies, pastoral care practitioners can help survivors regain agency and purpose. Survivors receive spiritual support through the Appreciative Way, which combines contemplative spirituality and inquiry. Narrative exploration can help trauma survivors envision a bright future based on love and resilience. This study suggests that AI principles may benefit pastoral care recipients who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. Pastoral caregivers can help survivors regain dignity, calling, and well-being by implementing an appreciative healing approach.

**Contribution:** The article sheds light on the dehumanising consequences of sex trafficking on vulnerable populations in South Africa, particularly women and children. This article aims to explain how AI concepts can be applied to Practical Theology. Specifically, this article will demonstrate how the Appreciative Way can be utilised in pastoral care for healing from sex trafficking trauma.

**Keywords:** sex trafficking; appreciative inquiry; Appreciative Way; pastoral care; survivors; sexual; abuse; exploitation; prostitution; commercial; regain; sense; purpose; needs; spiritual.

## Introduction

Sex trafficking is dehumanising and requires a pastoral response from the Church to help our sisters in Christ recover from trauma, as seen in the story below:

I owed the pimp money for drugs, so these gangsters paid the pimp directly and I was never paid. I was sold, a sex slave to these gangsters. I was locked up in a building and I was raped and physically abused for three days, forced to do anything they said in order to avoid them punching and kicking me... It is hard to describe the violence, but the closest explanation I can now come up with would be sadism, the enjoyment they got from abusing another person. Being trafficked by these gangsters for these three days was no different to the two weeks I had suffered when I first arrived in Joburg. (Grootboom 2016:70–71)

Pastoral care focuses on understanding how to support individuals in their specific circumstances and difficulties to encourage and facilitate their spiritual journey and practical understanding of God (Hunter 1980:69).

## Methodological framework

This article employs a qualitative approach and uses secondary data in presenting relevant information. It introduces a case example to present evidence of the lived experience of

sexual violence by a sex trafficking survivor. The study proposes the theoretical framework of appreciative inquiry (AI) as a significant contribution to the field of pastoral care and practical theology. Furthermore, the article seeks to answer the key research question: In what way can AI contribute to the field of pastoral care and practical theology?

Appreciative inquiry is founded on the concept of identifying an organisation's effective and energising aspects and using them as the foundation for its development (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987:12). This article addresses the use of AI and pastoral care to promote well-being in the context of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

## Understanding sexual trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation

Prostitution is exploitation; thus understanding its exploitative and humiliating aspects is crucial to understanding sex trafficking. The researcher claims all prostitution exploits and degrades its participants.

Thompson (2007:68) defines sex trafficking as recruiting, transporting, housing or receiving people for prostitution or other commercial sexual exploitation. Gabhan says Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) defines sexual exploitation as:

[T]he sexual violation of a person's human dignity, equality, and physical or mental integrity and a way for some people (mainly men) to gain power and dominance over others (mainly women and children) for sexual gratification, financial gain, and/or advancement. (Gabhan 2019:530)

Commercial sexual exploitation includes pornography, phone sex, live sex, peep shows, stripping, striptease and prostitution (Thompson 2007:68–70). Prostitution – selling sexual services – is the topic of this essay. Thompson (2007:68) defines prostitution as commercialised sexual activity. Dorchen Leidholdt, Co-Executive Director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, says it is often overlooked that sexually trafficked women are prostituted individuals rather than bakers (Leidholdt 2003:169). Sex trafficking would not exist without prostitution, which creates demand for sexually accessible people. The researcher agrees with Thompson that researching prostitution is essential to understanding sexually exploited people (Thompson 2007:68).

The researcher believes faith communities are alarmingly quiet on sex trafficking. Not enough is stated or done about this human rights violation. He believes pastors and pastoral caregivers are unprepared to combat sex trafficking. Despite its considerable effect on trafficked people, Okyere-Manu (2015:127) adds that Christian communities have been unprepared to combat sex trafficking. She adds, 'Until recently, Christian communities did not discuss human trafficking. It remains a concern because Christian communities have not adequately handled it' (Okyere-Manu

2015:127). Thus, the article suggests pastoral care to combat this pandemic.

## Establishing the correlation between prostitution and commercial sexual exploitation

Academics Melissa Farley (2009) and Dorchen Leidholdt (2003) vehemently criticise attempts to distinguish sex trafficking from prostitution. Farley claims that prostitution and trafficking are the same in practice. Farley argues that men's desire to exploit women is similar to prostitution (Farley 2004:169). Leidholdt calls sex trafficking 'globalised prostitution', whereas generic prostitution is 'local trafficking' (2004:169).

The 2020 position document drafted by Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, a former deputy minister of health and deputy speaker of the national assembly and co-founder of the non-governmental organisation Embrace Dignity, outlined the following views of the organisation:

- The systems of prostitution, sex trafficking and pornography have a long history of racial, sexual and economic exploitation and are inherently violent against women and other marginalised groups.
- The current exploitative socioeconomic, cultural and political environment fosters and sustains gender violence, poverty and inequality.
- Prostitution, sex trafficking and pornography are interconnected systems (Madlala-Routledge 2020:5, 9).

## Prostitution and commercial sexual exploitation should be classified as gender-based violence

This is the assertion of the researcher, and his claim is supported by scholarship. Leidholdt defines prostitution as a system that perpetuates gender-based control and entails acts of violence against women, including sexual abuse of children, rape and domestic violence (Leidholdt 2003:167).

Farley and colleagues thoroughly investigated prostitution, trafficking and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). About 854 people from 9 nations, including South Africa, participated in the research. The study's most crucial finding was that several traumas followed prostitution. The study found that 65% – 69% of prostituted individuals had been sexually abused as children. In addition, 70% – 95% were physically mistreated while in prostitution. Additionally, 60% – 75% were raped in prostitution. A large 88% suffered verbal and social stigma. They also note that verbal abuse as a prostitution consequence is underreported (Farley et al. 2004:56).

Women in prostitution and trafficking are often abused. Prostitution typically involves incest, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, stalking, rape, physical assault and torture. Farley calls prostitution sexual exploitation when people benefit from selling women, men and children. 'Prostituted women are the often-overlooked victims of intimate partner violence' (Farley et al. 2004:35–36).

## Analysing the interplay and context of phenomena that contribute to gender-based violence

With Farley's cooperation, the researcher claims the public misunderstands prostitution's hazards. Sex purchasers and pimps lie to cover the prevalent brutality against prostituted women. Public knowledge of prostitution's perils, like smoking, hurts the commercial sex industry's profits. Thus, prostitution would be actively concealed (Farley 2018:102–103).

Supporters of prostitution who say women are generating money or doing a necessary but difficult job blame the victims. They reinforce the perception that prostituted individuals are morally depraved and deviant. Advocates and prostituted individuals know the hazards of abuse and exploitation. Proponents of prostitution, typically use the women's purported high wealth to downplay these concerns and justify their action (Farley 2018:102–103).

To prevent human trafficking, the researcher suggests dismantling, uncovering and confronting these cultural norms, assumptions, gendered perceptions and false narratives. Another Farley study found that society accepts prostitution and seldom scrutinises consumers. She claims that many people still regard prostitution as a sexual act rather than as a sexual assault and a professional choice rather than a human rights violation (Farley 2016:1–2).

Leidholdt contends that the ongoing effort by specific organisations and governments to differentiate between human trafficking and prostitution, treating them as separate and unrelated occurrences, 'can be seen as a deliberate political strategy aimed at legitimizing the sex trade and protecting its growth and profitability' (Leidholdt 2003:181).

## Prostitution's commodification presents both immediate- and long-term risks

The researcher exhibited correlations among human trafficking, transactional sex and prostitution in his master's scholarly dissertation. Furthermore, he addressed in depth the subjects of objectification and commodification, arguing convincingly that they contribute to intimate partner violence (IPV) and gender-based violence (GBV) (Frieslaar 2019:95–96). His study referenced Hinga (2013:146–147) who contends, 'The pervasive maltreatment of girls and women is due to the perception that they are tradable commodities' (Frieslaar 2019:96).

Embrace Dignity contends that by designating prostitution as sex labour, its underlying violence and suffering are concealed and legitimised. Although the levels of abuse, coercion and violence may differ, all women involved in the practice of prostitution endure both physical and mental anguish. 'The interconnection between prostitution and sex trafficking is unequivocal, given the commodification and objectification of both human beings and sexual activity' (Frieslaar 2019:102)

Commodification requires objectification, the turning of humans into economic objects, according to Farley. 'Prostitution-related treatment of females as commodities increases the likelihood that they will continue to be a devalued class for the foreseeable future' (Farley 2018).

Dr Meagan Tyler, a senior researcher and professor in Sociology, offers a persuasive case against prostitution. During the discussion on the adverse impacts of prostitution, Tyler asserts that prostitution itself is harmful. This is valid irrespective of the presence or absence of any further physical or sexual damage. Furthermore, she claims that the sexual activity that takes place inside systems and organisations of prostitution is seen as both objectifying and dehumanising. It is also considered a violation of women's human rights and even categorised as a kind of violence against women (Tyler 2012:88).

Having discussed the concepts of objectification and commodification, the researcher next discusses the dehumanising effects or consequences of prostitution and human trafficking.

## Detrimental consequences of commercial sexual exploitation

Women compelled to engage in forced prostitution frequently encounter rape and physical violence, both of which undermine their self-esteem (Sambo & Spies 2020:83).

Okyere-Manu's study revealed that trafficking of women has physical, mental, spiritual and emotional implications that should not be ignored. Genitals, kidneys, pelvis, faces, jaws, noses, eyes, backs, necks, vertebrae, extremities, hands, feet, kidneys and abdomens are often lacerated by the actions of human trafficking. They have several infectious illnesses, including tuberculosis (TB), syphilis and human immunodeficiency virus or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV or AIDS). Other risks include high-risk pregnancies and deliveries, skin problems that induce headaches and exhaustion, pelvic infections, vaginal discharges and unplanned or teenage pregnancies caused by rape or forced sexual activity. Women trafficked are more susceptible to HIV and AIDS because they lack the liberty to seek contraception. Human trafficking victims often suffer brutal abuse and forced marriages. 'Reverend Father Jean Pierre, a priest at Malelane Catholic Church, acknowledged that some of the girls sold are murdered and exploited for muti' (Okyere-Manu 2015:125–126).

Tyler stresses that prostitution harms mental health (Tyler 2012:90). Tyler says Farley and other academics' work confirms this. Farley and colleagues investigated PTSD in prostituted individuals. The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) lists severe traumatic stressors like personal experience of a death or significant damage, danger to personal integrity, witnessing death or injury and sexual assault as potential causes of PTSD (Farley et al. 2004:36). As sexual assault is a DSM-listed severe traumatic stressor, the researcher links PTSD to sex trafficking.

After describing the negative effects of sex trafficking on women, the article briefly discusses survivors' needs, which the Church should be aware of. Spiritual, social, psychological, emotional and physical needs exist. As the researcher's PhD thesis addresses all these needs, this article cannot. It addresses spiritual needs.

### **Appreciating the spiritual needs of survivors**

It is crucial to adopt a holistic approach that considers the spiritual well-being of victims of sexual trafficking. According to Palm, Pool and Burgmayer (2007:217), sexual exploitation erodes one's sense of self, social connections and beliefs concerning the Divine. Furthermore, the authors suggest, 'individuals require mental and spiritual rehabilitation to reestablish their spirituality and sense of self, even subsequent to their physical liberation' (Palm et al. 2007:217).

According to researchers Palm and associates, fundamental spiritual needs of the survivor include the following: truth, unconditional love and hope, a sense of belonging, trust, redemption and restoration. The acknowledgement of truth enables survivors to place their trust in God for assistance and support. Unconditional love guarantees survivors dignity and respect. Hope instils renewed optimism and Divine acceptance. Belonging promotes acceptance and a sense of worth. Trust establishes interpersonal connections. Lastly, redemption and restoration reassure survivors of God's capability to deliver them from desolation. 'It is the Divine appointment of caregivers to offer aid and solace to those who are in distress, as well as to convey messages of healing and hope' (Palm et al. 2007:221–223).

With an appreciation of the spiritual needs of survivors, the article moves to explore the intersection of pastoral care and AI.

### **Appreciative inquiry: Principles and foundations**

Appreciative inquiry has been used as an organisational development strategy since the 1980s. According to Cooperrider, Stavros and Whitey (2008:xv), 'AI is a philosophy that incorporates an approach, a process for engaging people at any or all levels to produce effective, positive change' (Cooperrider et al. 2008:xv). They further elaborate AI is used globally for both small- and large-scale change. In an effort to adapt to change, organisations have blended this approach with others such as strategic planning, coaching, development of leadership and management, reorganisation, acquisitions and mergers, transforming cultures, collaborative work, diversity and cultural and sustainable development (Cooperrider et al. 2008:xv).

Drawing connections with theology, according to Sandu, 'Appreciative theology reveals a collaborative process between humanity and Divine that catalyses transformations in human being giving them life including eternal life' (Sandu 2011:129). It is this collaborative nature of AI, together with its focus on transformation that leads the researcher to propose this approach to pastoral care.

### **Practices and history of pastoral care**

Clebsch and Jaekle (1964) provided the most renowned definition of pastoral care:

The ministry of the cure of souls, or pastoral care, consists of helping acts, done by representative Christian persons, directed toward the healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling of troubled persons whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns. (p. 4)

Mwaura (2013:72) describes pastoral theology as the study of priests' spiritual care obligations. While pastoral care may not have always been called such, Gerkin (1997:21) emphasises that it has been an intrinsic part of the Christian narrative and historic legacy. He says 'before Christianity, pastoral care was a significant aspect of the Israelite community's life and tradition, out of which the Old Testament or Jewish scriptures emerged' (Gerkin 1997:21).

### **The convergence of pastoral care and appreciative inquiry**

The potential for enhancing care delivery strategies and promoting comprehensive community well-being at the nexus of pastoral care and AI is tremendous. By integrating AI ideas and methodologies into pastoral care settings, caregivers may promote healing, reconciliation and personal growth by using ways that focus on individuals' strengths. Scholars Sandu and Caras' (2014:88) paper examines the relationship between Christian theology and appreciative theory as it pertains to the field of Christian counselling. They 'propose a method of appreciative counselling' (Sandu & Caras 2014:88).

### **Practical applications of appreciative inquiry in pastoral care and religious contexts**

The use of AI would greatly enhance pastoral care. Pastoral caregivers might use a community participation and counselling strategy to uncover and affirm good traits in people and communities. Freddie Crous uses AI to help communities, according to AI practitioner. He led an albinism survivor appreciation investigation in 2018 (Crous 2019:13–14). Charlton and Bukashe give a case study of how AI helped 75 parishes and 45000 people of the Anglican Diocese of Johannesburg transition to leadership (Bukashe & Charlton 2013:9).

It is essential to locate AI in the African context, which follows next.

### **Appreciative inquiry from an African perspective**

It should be mentioned that African contexts are the origins of AI. Practitioners Drs. Mette Jacobsgaard and Anastasia Bukashe in their paper provide African perspectives on AI. The following questions, which the authors pose, are meant to convey their interest: 'How have people in Africa contextualised AI? Where does AI fit into the African context?'

(Jacobsgaard & Bukashe 2019:5). They go on to explain that AI developed in the African context. According to Jacobsgaard and Bukashe, 'therefore, it is incorrect to assume that AI, as a Western-centric methodology, will be contextualized differently in Africa' (Jacobsgaard & Bukashe 2019:5).

They cite other research that demonstrates the implementation of AI concepts in African environments to support their claim. An essay by Father Patrick Shanahan, who changed the lives of people in Africa by using AI in his work with street children, is very pertinent to this subject. His influence on countless Africans may still be seen in the lives he influenced by encouraging self-worth, confidence and finding the good things in life – even in the face of hardship (Jacobsgaard & Bukashe 2019:5–6).

Therefore, the use of AI in dealing with survivors who suffer trauma and shame has promise due to its life-changing influence on self-worth in an African environment. According to Motsi and Masango, 'an African sees a person as a whole person whose core is his or her spirituality' (Motsi & Masango 2012:2). The African viewpoint expressed here speaks to the researcher as an African clergyman and theologian, and it influences how he views trauma.

The combination of contemplative spirituality and AI is relevant to the statement made above by Motsi and Masango. The Appreciative Way is the name given to this synthesis. This synthesis helps us to think of AI as a method and philosophy that is incarnational and resurrection-oriented. It is incarnational in that it is predicated on an interactive process wherein the agent of change integrates with the object of change.

Since AI looks for that which gives life even in the face of death, it may also be thought of as resurrection-oriented (Voyle & Voyle 2021).

The article now focusses on the Appreciative Way as a component of the framework for pastoral care and healing. The researcher chooses the Appreciative Way because the appreciative approach is not like the conventional medical model-based problem-solving techniques, which tend to overemphasise the nature and causes of issues, creating vicious cycles of defensiveness and blaming. This method enables people to address the underlying causes of issues rather than just concentrating on their symptoms, encouraging empathy and innovative transformation. According to Voyle and Voyle (2006):

The Appreciative Way does not ignore nor avoid problems. Rather, it suggests that what we need to do to solve problems is to move from the problem mindset, which created or nurtured the problem, to a solution mindset. (p. 9)

It is this focus on empathy and innovative transformation and embracing a solution mindset that the researcher views as the significant way in which the appreciative approach enriches pastoral care.

## Embracing an Appreciative Way to healing the wounded

In their book, *Core Elements of the Appreciative Way*, authors Voyle and Voyle (2021:7) note that the Appreciative Way is essential to this technique of AI as it 'serves as a framework for comprehending human behavior'. This strategy promotes a more positive outlook than modern problem-solving techniques, which usually lead to pessimism, guilt, dissatisfaction and poor results (Voyle & Voyle 2021:7).

Spiritual concepts are the foundation of the Appreciative Way, according to its creators (Voyle & Voyle 2021:7). According to the researcher, this is connected with the need of attending to the spiritual needs of survivors. The authors suggest that:

At the heart of the universe is a heart of love that embraces us and accepts us unconditionally. This heart of love is the source of our existence and life. This loving heart created us for a purpose and has given us every resource we need to fulfil that purpose. (Voyle & Voyle 2021:7)

The researcher connects the above with the principle of love, one of the pillars of pastoral care, according to Stancil. He emphasises the importance of love when he says that:

Jesus's command to 'love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind', as well as 'love your neighbor as yourself' (Matthew 22:37–39), forms the bedrock of pastoral care. (Stancil 1996:6)

The researcher aligned with Stancil when he elaborates by saying:

[A]ccording to the Principle of Love, we should actively and compassionately care for the well-being of others, looking beyond their sin and brokenness to see that they are human beings created in God's image. (Stancil 1996:6)

## The role of storytelling within Appreciative Way in response to trauma

There are three crucial narratives, or 'truths' that must be shared following a traumatic event, which will achieve an Appreciative Way as suggested by authors, Voyle and Voyle (2006:41).

### Something negative occurred

Voyle and Voyle (2006:41) describes this as the account of an unfortunate incident and the events that led to pain, suffering, shame, anxiety and rage. 'Regrettably, we often develop a voyeuristic attachment to the tragedy and lose the ability to see beyond the atrocities to the realities that nonetheless provide life' (Voyle & Voyle 2006:41). This means that, in the counsellor's narrative work with survivors, while embracing the Appreciative Way, she (the survivor) can be assisted to acknowledge the horrific events of sex trafficking and its consequences. Together, pastoral counsellor and survivor bring before God these dehumanising and traumatic experiences, lamenting them and the survivor is led through prayerful conversation with God.

### The fact that the individual is still alive

Many trauma survivors remain stuck in the trauma, wanting to find a way out and are ignorant of their psychological survival. To preserve their survival, the authors suggest, 'Survivors must concentrate on the behaviors they engaged in throughout the trauma, including dissociation or avoidance'. The authors further explain that the survivors may benefit from an understanding of the human psyche's inventiveness in reacting to life-threatening circumstances by listening to these positive narratives. They may find better ways to conduct their life by concentrating on amazement instead of judgement. They learn more useful coping mechanisms from this technique to deal with hardships in life (Voyle & Voyle 2006:41).

### The potential for evil in humans is inferior to the source of life

In all this suffering, where is God? With respect to the question 'Where is God when it hurts?' (1997), Philip Yancey (1997) tackles this issue uniquely. Most religions seek to solve this basic existential issue according to Voyle and Voyle (2006:41). Even when humanity has done terrible things to itself, life is still given to us. The writers argue, 'Can you muck up more than God can love you? Find another deity. The only deity worthy of your worship is one whose love exceeds humanity's wickedness' (Voyle & Voyle 2006:41). The pastoral caregiver will show the victim this unconditional love of God throughout therapy.

According to *The Appreciative Way* authors, the interdependence of truths is crucial, where focusing solely on positive narratives may lead to denial, while dwelling on negative stories can foster victim consciousness and hinder moving forward (Voyle et al. 2006:41).

Validating and encouraging survivors' lives in Christ is essential. Each of us was made to glorify God. Survivors are God's children. Living with purpose is essential to the Appreciative Way. 'We embody our purpose best when we are doing and being what flows from our core and brings profound pleasure or delight', say the Voyles. 'Discovering our true purpose will benefit ourselves and others' (Voyle & Voyle 2006:13).

By way of moving to a conclusion, this article will next offer some pastoral guidelines for pastors and pastoral caregivers.

### Pastoral guidelines

The pastoral guidelines are as follows:

- As storytelling and narrative form a significant component of the Appreciative Way, it is vital to provide ample opportunities for survivors of sex trafficking to share their stories in a safe environment where they will feel protected and affirmed.
- In the course of allowing them to share their stories, it is crucial that the pastoral caregiver practises active and empathetic listening and that the survivor is assured that they are heard and believed.

- Examine and challenge the ways in which religious texts diminish and undermine the status of women and strive to rectify discriminatory doctrines and systems within the church that restrict women's agency.
- Preach sermons and homilies that create awareness about this tragic and harmful phenomenon and emphasise the grace and redemptive love of God in Jesus Christ.
- Run Bible studies that emphasise how Jesus valued women and challenged damaging patriarchal systems and stereotypes.
- Offer liturgies of healing with opportunities to receive Communion.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this article explores the intersection of AI and pastoral care within the context of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. By recognising the inherent strengths in individuals and communities, AI offers a constructive approach to addressing existential, emotional and spiritual challenges. Integrating AI principles into pastoral care environments holds promise for fostering holistic well-being and facilitating transformative change. Embracing an Appreciative Way to healing acknowledges the spiritual needs of survivors, providing a framework for reclaiming dignity, purpose and hope in the face of trauma and exploitation. The article concluded by providing some pastoral guidelines to empower the church.

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## Authors' contributions

B.V.F. and M.J.M. have both contributed equally towards the development of this manuscript.

## Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

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