

Social representations of teachers on school-office mistreatment

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ABSTRACT

Social representations (SRs) of selected teachers on short- and long-term school-office mistreatment and how they react, retort and develop coping mechanisms related to the issues on 'social justice' in educational leadership or management. Using Moscovici's SR theory, a method in the representational field that involved key respondent-interviews, storytelling (*kwentuhan*), and "associative network" approach among teacher-respondents selected by a snowball sampling technique from undisclosed schools in the Philippines. In exploring SR on mistreatment and coping mechanisms of teachers, polarity and neutrality indices were computed as synthetic measurements of evaluation and attitude implicit in the representational field of school-office mistreatment or abuses. In case studies, the small number of participants allow for particularization or illustration of the uniqueness of the individual cases as viewed by them when shared in groups of academics. Insights on teachers' subject loading, teachers' assignments in research and extension, office designations and other provisions on sabbatical leave, research fellowships and faculty exchange programs also presented as reactions or coping mechanisms after the episodes of mistreatment.

Keywords: educational justice, social justice, teacher education, social representations, story-telling, associative network

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INTRODUCTION

Excluding physical violence, the topic on mistreatment (or workplace abuse) has been tackled in many countries by organizational scholars from Australia, Europe, and the United States (Blasé et al., 2006). However, in the Philippines, research on this topic has been so sluggish and the emerging literature dealing with the effects of mistreatment and workplace abuses may lead to harmful outcomes for victimized teachers) as revealed in the works of Blasé et al. (2006, 2008, 2009), Keashly (2021), and that of Neuman and Baron (1998). Most recent works on teachers mistreatment using varied terms are by de Wet and Jacobs (2021), Keashly (2021), and Setiawan et al. (2021).

Teachers as social objects are constituted by representations, i.e., discourse and concerted action of the members of the group that maintain a homogenic communication. In difference countries, mistreatment (=violence and abuses), the recent works of Masath et al. (2021) in Tanzania and Sam (2021) on unethical behavior shaping teachers' behavior; and a review on workplace violence and burnout (Chirico et al., 2022) contribute to the growing interest on mistreatment and other related topics. No published material is available about teachers' mistreatment in the Philippines; thus, this

work. Teachers are central to this inquiry on how they were mistreated or "abused" by their academic heads or immediate supervisors/administrators in collusion with some teachers who owe loyalty in the context of the politics of patronage (see patronage in the governance, Masagca et al., 2009). Usage of educational justice in this paper center's into a 'just teaching and learning system' for all stakeholders in the educative process. Specifically, a 'socially just educational learning system' within the teachers' job is both welfarist and educationist (Waltenberg, 2004). This notion describes the four main sets of theories of social justice (utilitarianism, egalitarianism, libertarianism, and liberal-egalitarianism).

Representations of selected teacher-respondents (TRs) on short- and long-term school or office mistreatment and how they responded and developed their coping mechanisms related to the issues on 'social justice' in educational leadership or management were determined in the study.

Serge Moscovici's theory of social representation (SR) was used in analyzing representations of teachers about educational justice and mistreatment. It was certainly important that this paper uses the lens in a social psychological framework of concepts and ideas. This can be properly understood as being embedded in historical, cultural and macro-social conditions (Wagner et al., 1999). An SR is a collective

phenomenon pertaining to a community, which is co-constructed by individuals in their daily talk and action. Such representation is

“an ensemble of thoughts and feelings being expressed in verbal and overt behavior of actors, which constitute an object for a social group”.

Observing “talk and actions” of a “social group” of Filipino teachers who were subjected to short- and long-term mistreatment and are now actively involved in research and publications would be an important input to *design corrective and preventive measures in order to limit occurrences* (Blasé & Blasé, 2002, 2018). Contrary to textbook definitions, a social group (a minimum of four people), which is a set of at least two people that confronts at least one other group. Because a group is a subset of a universe of people, the shared understanding of their world and of the objects composing it provides the ground for communication and other forms of co-action. The phenomena composing the local world of a group (as in this inquiry hereto referred as groups of teachers who experienced mistreatment and are actively involved in research and publications) are social objects. In SR theory, there is no doubt that things or objects can be described by frames. The frames in psychology are provided by physics, chemistry, biology and other sciences. The descriptions proffered by these frames are valid descriptions by themselves but are said to be inappropriate to capture the specific social characteristics of objects constituting the local worlds (Wagner et al., 1999) that these mistreated teachers have. Social objects are constituted by representations, i.e., discourse and concerted action of the members of the group that maintain a homogamic communication (=people prefer to communicate to others of similar opinions and to read newspapers, which are likely to confirm one’s own beliefs instead of confronting opposite opinions).

METHODOLOGY

A multi-method was used in this study to reveal the complexity and multidimensionality of SRs different methods were employed in the present study (de Rosa, 1993, 1994, 2002). Yin (2003, cited in JOAAG 2009) stressed that the use of multi-methods not only provides a more in-depth data set but also allows the researcher to validate findings and thus increase the reliability of the findings.

Key informant interviews, field observations, storytelling, the use of narratives, and the methods in SRs were employed in this inquiry. Field observations were carried out in various areas with the support of research assistants, as volunteer school facilitators (VSFs) by interviewing TRs who are either academic teaching or service faculty from various schools in Luzon, Philippines. Purposively selected TRs were evaluated based on their personal experiences as faculty-researcher and involvement in research and development activities such as publishing or presenting papers in different forums, community leadership as adviser or committee chairperson of programs and projects; and the overall knowledge on educational justice or social justice in education. In the selection process, each prospective teacher-informant together with VSF was requested to recommend other teachers in the school who could be involved following the snowballing technique. Suitability was determined based on teaching performance, involvement in research and publications, past and present experiences on short- and long-term mistreatment, and other considerations (i.e., trustworthiness of the testimonies/narrations and stories on their

exposures with abusive or unreasonable school administrators, and uniqueness of the individual cases as viewed by the researchers).

A series of interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire was used as a general guide that involved the academics as to their representations about

- (a) nature of mistreatment or the phenomenon of having abusive school administrators,
- (b) responses, coping strategies, and other ways to circumvent teachers’ mistreatment,
- (c) notions about educational justice and injustice in the school, where they work,
- (d) how teachers’ involvement in research and publications and other scholarly pursuits can help them cope with mistreatment, and
- (e) policy recommendations for corrective and preventive measures to limit the occurrence of mistreatment.

There was a tendency to undergo contextualization and subsequent generalization during the investigation.

Many *ad-hoc* questions were asked during informal interviews. These were carried out on field work together with VSF whenever or wherever possible over meals, during snacks in the canteen, on the corridors of government halls and in public places. Moreover, telephone or cellular phones were used in the interviews of selective research assistants with VSF (that ensured trustworthiness and validity of the responses). There were reflections made, and the study attempted to keep the participant identities with the strictest confidentiality. In gathering data, quotations representing discovered constructs or concepts were placed together to form narratives. These stories, episodes or narratives are contained within the indented summaries.

Key Informant-Interviews, Storytelling (“*kwentuhan*” in Filipino Language) (Javier, 2004), & Focus Group Discussions

Certain properties of story-telling (one of the most fundamental forms of communication according to Barthes, 1988) known as “*kwentuhan*” or “*pakikipagkwentuhan*” (Javier, 2004) in the Filipino language, conveying ideas and images, was employed in the present study. This ethnographic technique is a naturally occurring phenomenon or process of sharing and telling stories among individuals to figure out or to make sense about their world and their experiences. This is basically a lively and always a happy group discussion in which the participants are actively involved (such as in the classroom, in the public market, over meals and while resting in their abode as well as the workplace). The educative aspect of this process allows individuals to share personal experiences with others and make ideas part of the collective knowledge of a community (McEwan & Egan, 1995; Mello, 2001). Moreover, stories are hailed by practitioners and theorists as important teaching tools that assist in psychosocial and imaginative growth (Bettelheim, 1977; Bruner, 1990). In research, story-telling can be situated at the heart of meaning-making (or constructivism) and the broader aspect of educative inquiry.

In the discussion, the use of traditional “*pakikipagkwentuhan*” (see Masagca & Londerio, 2008; Masagca et al., 2009) was employed focusing on the world of mistreatment, reasons of being mistreated and how they were able to cope with short- and long-term mistreatment. There were “personal stories” as stimuli depicting teachers being mistreated in the school in relation to teacher education and school

management. Respondents were asked to describe how these occurrences affected them *personally, psychologically, socially, physically, and economically*. In order to enhance the stimuli, teachers were asked to tell a story how it affected his/her economic conditions and give concrete examples. Thematic and content analyses of the interview data were done by making dichotomies characterized by their SRs within the theme of educational justice or social justice in education.

Associative Network Approach in Social Representations (de Rosa, 2002)

The technique of de Rosa (1994, 2002) known as “associative network” was used to identify SR of educational justice and social justice in educational or learning system as seen by those groups of teachers (social, biological, and physical) who experience mistreatment. The method attempted to ‘highlight contents, structure, and the index of polarity of the semantic field associated to the words used as a stimulus’ (de Rosa & Bossi, 2002). The stimuli words were: “justice in education”, “teachers who are subjected to mistreatment in schools”, “coping mechanisms, adaptive techniques, and resiliency against school mistreatment”, and “how teachers should communicate with other professionals about mistreatment of school heads”.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Teacher-Respondents

TRs had the ages from 27 to 54 years old, mostly females (n=7) and males (n=3). Almost all of TRs have already obtained their post-bachelor’s degrees, with one male having a bachelor’s degree only while the rest have either received MA/MSc or PhD/EdD.

Short- & Long-Term Mistreatment

Interviews were made in separate locations totaling to 50 teachers, but only 10 teachers are highlighted in the narration, discourse, and analysis. Although gender, age, educational attainment, religious affiliation are important and appear to have influence on the occurrences of conflicting teacher-administrators, these variables were not considered in the inquiry. Varied effects, solutions, responses, coping mechanisms and personal strategies were revealed by TRs during interviews and discussions. During the interviews and storytelling sessions various combinations, situations and characteristics of the *dramatis personae* involved in the teacher-superior (administrator) in conflict and hereto claimed as teachers’ mistreatment and the phenomenon of having abusive administrators.

Social Representations on Mistreatment

SR of teachers’ mistreatment were examined with a total of 50 TRs using associative network approach in eight focus groups. It was ensured that each group was homogenous, defined by age, gender and educational background. During the interview, reports made by Blasé and Blasé (2002) and Blasé et al. (2006), were presented as stimuli for discussion. Likewise, movies about teachers were also noted during the sessions. Thematic and content analyses of the interview data showed that nine dichotomies characterized SR of mistreated teachers:

- (1) verbal/non-verbal,
- (2) harmful/unharmful,
- (3) stressing/relaxing,
- (4) trust/distrust,

- (5) fair/unfair,
- (6) lucky/unlucky,
- (7) indirect/direct supervisor behavior,
- (8) more “influential”/not influential (politics of “patronage” in education), and
- (9) past/present performance in evaluation.

Many metaphors were used, with teachers’ mistreatment and abusive administrators or being associated metaphorically with, for example, abusive administrators being associated with fear of termination due to designations of their chancellors/presidents/rectors; mistreatment experiences are being associated with the Filipino notions of “*malas*” (unlucky) and “*suwerte*” (lucky) and being associated with death and terrorism.

Chronological references focused on the development of the mistreatment from short- to long-term and how these mistreated teachers responded by engaging in scholarly work, research involvement, speakerships and research publications. There was a perceived fear among TRs, which was considered to be an important argument for females but not for males. Improving the level of education, acquiring advanced studies and getting scholarship trainings appeared to be associated with the coping mechanisms or strategies of the mistreated teachers by their academic/department heads or immediate supervisors/administrators. The notion of “capabilities” (e.g., advancing oneself academically, fellowships or travels abroad, knowledgeable of the specific work/tasks) become more visible as TRs repeatedly expressed how their immediate supervisors disregard their achievements, which are actually the component of capabilities (or the ability to do perform tasks well). Capabilities of the mistreated teachers and so with the academic or department heads and immediate supervisors/administrators become central to the aspects associated with mistreatment and so with the socio-psychological nature and financial status of the persons concerned in mistreatment.

In exploring SR on mistreatment and coping mechanisms of teachers, tentative polarity and neutrality indices were computed as synthetic measurements of evaluation and attitude implicit in the representational field of “teachers’ mistreatment”. 10 TRs gave a total of 43 words associated with mistreatment by asking them to answer the question: *Why was I mistreated/abused/victimized by my immediate supervisor/administrator or academic/department head?*

Index of polarity ($\text{number of + words minus number of - words / number of total words associated with mistreatment}$) was computed as 0.25, which means that most words expressed by the respondents are connoted positively. Positive association means that these words written by TRs are overtones of their claims of being victimized. In terms of the neutrality index ($\text{number of neutral words minus the no. of positive words plus the no. of negative words divided by total number of associated words}$) was computed as -0.697. This means that the neutral words tend to be equal to the sum of the positive and negative words. This value indicates that the representations of TRs appear to be balanced considering that there are factors that these teachers expressed are also considered by their administrators.

The importance of these measurements when increased in the number subjects and as to the number of words to be associated is the results of themselves not of a *post-hoc* categorical analysis on the basis of the evaluation of the researchers. In furthering the synthesis of the evaluation and attitude implicit in the representational field, these

indices can be used in the future for particularization of the groups to be illustrated so that generalized views may be presented.

In the context of educational justice and social justice in education, SRs of the teachers under consideration are formed to cope with the feeling of being secluded, isolated or disregarded. Teacher can turn to no one during the mistreatment since most faculty members in the department either kept quiet and some collude or act as “conspirators” with the “abusive” administrators. TRs also believe that the “*politics of patronage*” in schools have a role in micro-cultural tolerance and acceptance of the actions of abusive administrators to mistreat teachers whom they do not like or not familiar due to some pressure groups or affiliations. Overall, the results reflect the development of a new common sense in which popularized notions that teachers’ (or academics’) mistreatment become directly associated with the general definitions of educational justice or injustice and inequities for exemplary teachers who experienced being victimized by their immediate supervisors.

In the literature on workplace abuse and teachers mistreatment of their school principals, Blasé and Blasé (2018) noted a wide range of verbal/non-verbal behaviors and physical behaviors, which were also noted in the present study as dichotomies. The most common ones, which were revealed by the teacher-informants are: snubbing and ignoring in the office, excessive unfounded criticisms on the reports or research papers submitted, threats of job loss by using performance evaluation, unreasonable job demands such as giving difficult tasks, withholding resources and obstructing opportunities for the teacher to travel and present papers in the disguise of policies, and a behavior of “master-servant” relationships.

TEACHERS’ NARRATIVES

The following are some of the teachers’ narratives.

“After long years of teaching, I got a performance rating of NI (needs improvement), and I could not believe that this thing happened to me ... Even in other criteria (e.g., research and publications) that I feel I can get a rating of four or five, I got a mark of 1.5 from my peers. This was surprising, considering that I regularly received a research award from my school. I think, my peers or co-teacher evaluators have ‘conspiracy’ with my boss ...” (mistreated teacher, TR12F04).

“I was removed from my position due to the advanced degree (PhD) school policy for administrators ... I was asked to finish my PhD in the related field in order to get the designation ... but I discovered that some of my colleagues who do not possess the PhD were retained in their positions ... I filed a study leave for my PhD and also the sabbatical leave but as a faculty-administrator with a rank of associate professor, I was not given the sabbath due to the PhD requirement ... I think equal opportunities have to be provided to all of us in the school ...” (mistreated teacher, TR08M56).

“I refrained myself from being involved in various programs and projects of the school. At first, I was responsible for developing the speech and oratorical clubs, but after I was treated unfairly, I became an expatiator in the school not contributing/sharing my time. This negative attitude irritated

my boss and ‘snubbed’ and even ‘mobbed’ me. She even asked some of my colleagues as spies and peeped into my room of the things that I do or teach in the room ...” (mistreated teacher, TR24F25).

Taking a clue from Tyler’s advice that educational leaders can use teachers’ perspectives and experiences when developing curriculum, instruction and educational policy, there are lessons learned from this inquiry on teachers’ mistreatment by their superiors as inputs to educational justice and educational leadership and management. From the results, it appears that the most important themes for consideration as to the occurrence of teachers’ mistreatment are, as follows:

- (a) the capability,
- (b) the social-psychological dimensions of the individual teachers/administrators and their groups (teachers and administrators) in the school, and
- (c) economics or financial wellness.

From the inquiry, it can be noted that deficiency in capabilities (the “lack of power to do something”) of either the teacher or the superior (=academic head/administrator) in the exercise of their duties and responsibilities can lead to mistreatment. Fitting into Sen’s (2003) thinking, to judge the lives of teachers and school administrators can actually lead us in the assessment of their individual “capabilities”. For justice to exist, teachers are expected to have the “resources to lead lives that they themselves consider to be good ones” (see Sen’s (2003) hypothesis on justice and capability). In the present study, individual stories on teachers’ mistreatment made us to think and believe Sen’s (2003) notion of “methodological individualism” is observable in the lives of teachers in the Philippines. In response to requisite of considering larger community of teachers or social groups (that is why we used SR theory here). Initial results show that their capabilities, socio-psychological characteristics and financial status are considerably associated with the reasons why teachers’ mistreatment happen in every school that needs to be addressed either by the Department of Education or the Commission on Higher Education in the Philippines.

Looking into concept of individual freedom, Sen (2003) recognizes that individual freedom is exercised in a social context. A connection exists on our understanding that “the exercise of freedom is mediated by values”, but values as seen in views of teachers who experience mistreatment, and with their superiors (or school heads or administrators) mistreating them appear to be having contrasting values so that this phenomenon continue to exist in schools. Results of different indices (polarity or neutrality) and elicitation and evocation of words cannot be analyzed at this point since fewer associated words were generated from limited TRs. But even the limited number of associated words obtained from the respondents, we can already derive broad meanings and can be formed in the future that may correspond or recognize cognitive processes among mistreated teachers.

When the mistreated TRs discuss with their colleagues and reveal their experiences, the danger of reprisal becomes more visible (as narrated by TRs (TI25F28, TI44F31, TI06M48, and TR25F28). Because of this, these TRs involved in the study need appropriate and protective venues in presenting their views, experiences or ordeal in public/academic discussions so that more social interactions can occur that can help reduce or minimize the occurrence of mistreatment in schools. In fact, it is pertinent to note that the papers of Blasé and Blasé (2002) used *social interactionism*. In putting their experiences to light

appears to be within the “participatory freedoms” that Sen (2003) tries to drive at. In particular, Sen (2003) was concerned with the agency role of the individual as a member of the public and as a participant in “economic, social and political actions”. Thus, it is imperative that public discussions and presentation in academic meetings are appropriate venues to present their perspectives about these occurrences of mistreatment and in a larger view, justice and injustices in the schools/workplace.

On the socio-psychological dimensions, contributing to this is the urgent need to understand that the school is an ‘ensemble of thoughts and feelings’ of the academics and non-academic groups creating a unique system composed of both structural and relational aspects, similar to the concept of the “ecology of teaching and learning” as described by Masagca (2002) that viewed to serve the best interests of all stakeholders within the notions of justice or equity. The capabilities of these teachers and their superiors as the administrators are important in trying to balance all feelings and thoughts in the schools, where the phenomenon of mistreatment occurs. The argument, that capabilities are very closely linked to rights does not need further elucidation. It is noted here that if mistreatment is found to be associated with capabilities then it is also expected to be directly associated with rights and the “language of capabilities”. This will give these teachers the right or chances to tackle mistreatment issues not in their own school system but in the public sphere or even in academic discussions in order to prescribe necessary solutions or to limit its occurrence.

Reflecting on the “rights to resources with which one may pursue one’s life” becomes an important view of the present study that considers economic dimensions or financial status as central to the teachers’ mistreatment. Can these mistreated teachers have also the rights on “access of resources or opportunities”? If school heads/administrators whose duty of providing all teachers in general (except those mistreated teachers) with resources and opportunities “who that someone is”, then injustice and socially unjust situation will continue to occur in schools.

Three TRs (TI25F28, TI44F31, and TI06M48) claim of “robbing opportunities” due to reprisals started with the notion of “the lack of capabilities” (on either the teacher and the superior or administrator), then denying that human or teacher’s right of access to opportunities (e.g., to be promoted or have increased faculty ranking pursuant to the merits and promotion rules; or even policies or travel abroad to present papers) and continuously experiencing mistreatment on a long-term basis. All of these will have lasting deleterious effects on their profession and the economic financial status of the mistreated teachers. The interplay of capabilities, socio-psychological circumstances and economics as income of the teacher as central to the notion of teachers’ mistreatment as revealed within the subjects’ representations clearly suggests the formulation of a proposed conceptual model on the phenomenon of teachers’ mistreatment in schools deserve for further inquiry.

IMPLICATIONS TO TEACHER EDUCATION & SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Blasé et al. (2006) stressed that teacher educators in university-based teacher preparation programs typically emphasized only the positive aspects of and approaches to teaching; seldom do they address the dark side of school life. In this study on educational justice (teachers’ mistreatment), which enumerated the negative effects but in the end it

appears that after using SRs on the mixed methodological approach, there appears to be some positive results or renewed circumstances.

Considering from the small samples, the mistreated teachers have further excelled in scholarly pursuits, in research and publications that improved their capabilities, and the economic status due to promotions (after mistreatment) and gained social recognition that boost their socio-psychological attributes.

Moreover, we observe from the responses of the teachers possibly having association with the inherent Filipino view that “*Ang pagkaka-api ay siyang nagpapatibay sa kakayahan, pag-uugali at pangkabuayan*” (in sufferings/problems brought about by injustices can enhance the capabilities, strengthen the character and resulted to a sustained livelihood). Teachers’ mistreatment is a huge challenge among TRs, giving positive results if the parameters of perseverance, patience, resourcefulness and ability to circumvent the onslaught of these superiors who lack the capabilities and leadership to manage schools. It is suggested in silent policies that for those who are experiencing mistreatment, they can opt for any of the following remedies during and after mistreatment:

- (1) teachers’ assignments in research projects and extension initiatives instead of full-load teaching so as not to be directly exposed to these abuses of the supervisors,
- (2) teachers’ designations and other provisions on sabbatical leave, research fellowships and faculty exchange programs, and
- (3) designation as university/college research faculty status with significant reduction in classroom teaching that can be additional sources of stress or can be “used” or capitalized by these administrators in order to create a negative atmosphere or chances of reprisals in the disguise of administrative prerogatives.

CONCLUSIONS

Pertinently, the research also takes a stock from transformational leadership theory that after mistreatment some teachers have created positive changes in their lives and have tended for them to create teachers “networks” that take care of each other’s interests and act in the interests of the group in the context of educational justice. These informal “networks” seemingly would not succeed in schools due to lesser number of teachers who would like to be in the open arena to describe about mistreatment. Based on this initial study on mistreatment among Filipino teachers, there is a tendency to just keep mum or shy away from the others or colleagues who would like to discover this “dark side of their lives as teachers”. Culture has something to do with this circumstance unlike in other countries when teachers can openly discuss about mistreatment, which we found here to be seemingly restrictive.

The misconception of mistreatment as having devastating effects among teachers appears to be disregarded considering that based on representations, positive impacts were noted in TRs’ capabilities, socio-psychological maturity and improvement of the economic status as seen in their salaries due to promotions of some teachers. There is a compelling need that school authorities in the Philippines must consider the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation (teachers’ mistreatment in the context of educational justice and social justice in education) and to pay greater attention to the context and the

diversity and multiplicity of “voices” presented by TRs as seen from the narratives. In using mixed methods, there was the intention to identify the different conditions under which SR can emerge and function. Likewise, this teachers’ journey has to deal with more exercises on contextualization in order to see a generalized view of educational justice or social justice in education in the Philippines. An exhaustive survey of extant literatures can also lead to a more plausible conclusion and acceptable corrective measures limiting teachers’ mistreatment. A module on Educational Justice for Pre-service Teachers would include details on the different situations that mistreatment can occur in order to orient these student/practice teachers about representations of mistreatment, the knowledge and practice of social justice in teaching, research and learning. It is during the student teaching or practice teaching experience that pre-service teachers are susceptible to mistreatment. The unique experience to be exposed into the vagaries of some of these practice teacher supervisors or school administrators handling novice teachers, where mistreatment can easily happen need to be looked into the future for further inquiries. Workable and functional mechanisms of addressing grievances in schools can reduce such phenomenon of abuse or mistreatment within the context of educational justice.

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Data availability: Data generated or analyzed during this study are available from the authors on request.

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