



The Impact of Workplace Social Inclusion and Workplace Social Support on the Work Performance of Employees with Disabilities

¹Muhammad Adnan & ²Aliya Khalid

¹PhD. Scholar, Department of Social Work, University of the Punjab, Pakistan

²Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, University of the Punjab, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

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This study investigated the impact of workplace social inclusion and workplace social support on the work performance of employees with disabilities in the private manufacturing sector of Punjab, Pakistan. Drawing on social inclusion theory and social support theory, the study examined how inclusive organizational practices and supportive workplace relationships influenced the performance outcomes of employees with disabilities. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected from 798 employees with disabilities working in private manufacturing firms across Punjab. A stratified sampling technique ensured representation from major industrial cities, including Lahore, Faisalabad, Sialkot, Gujranwala, and Gujrat. Data were gathered using structured questionnaires based on validated scales measuring workplace social inclusion, workplace social support, and work performance. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results indicated that both workplace social inclusion and workplace social support had significant positive effects on the work performance of employees with disabilities. Employees who experienced higher levels of inclusion and support in the workplace demonstrated better job performance. Furthermore, workplace social inclusion emerged as a stronger predictor of performance compared to social support, highlighting the critical role of inclusive organizational environments.

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Corresponding Author's Email: adnanmalik9337@gmail.com

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1.0 Introduction

In contemporary organizational research, workplace inclusivity and supportive work environments have gained increasing attention as critical determinants of employee outcomes, particularly in relation to marginalized groups such as employees with disabilities. Although the world has made progress in improving the employment opportunities of people with disabilities, these barriers remain a significant obstacle to their full engagement within the organizational life. Although people with disability have enjoyed improvements in EO across the world, there remain structural, attitudinal and environmental barriers that continue to prevent people with disability from accessing the full value of being engaged in the organizational life. These difficulties are more pronounced in developing country context in Pakistan because of lack of institutional enforcement of inclusion policies, socio-cultural biases and lack of workplace accommodations (Chaudhry, 2026). In turn, workers with disabilities are often excluded from informal networks, denied access to organisational resources, and have diminished psychological safety, which may have a negative impact on their work performance and career development (Stawnychko et al., 2025).

In this context, workplace social inclusion is defined as how employees feel accepted, respected and part of formal and informal systems and processes within an organization, as well as the opportunities they have to be part of decision-making. Workplace social support, on the other hand, is emotional, informational, and instrumental support from supervisors, co-workers, and the organization itself that aids in dealing with job demands and improving employee functioning. The concept of work performance is defined as the ability of employees to perform tasks effectively in achieving the organization's expectations and making contributions to productivity outcomes (Vuong & Nguyen, 2022). From a theoretical point of view, both social inclusion and social support can be linked to performance outcomes, both in terms of the social inclusion theory and the social support theory: according to both theories, individuals who feel valued and supported are more likely to show high levels of motivation, engagement, and productivity at work. These theoretical approaches all highlight the importance of psychological and structural factors, such as inclusive environments and supportive relationships, as resources that can positively influence employee functioning, specifically for vulnerable groups like persons with disabilities (PWD) (Gačić & Cvetković, 2025).

Previous studies have recognized the role of workplace inclusion and social support for improving overall employee outcomes, but research has been limited in its understanding of how workplace inclusion and social support relate to the job performance of employees with disability in developing economies manufacturing sector settings. Existing studies have predominantly been undertaken in developed countries or in the general workforce, fail to examine disabled employees in resource-poor settings (Hashmi et al., 2023). In addition, the relative importance of an employee's social inclusion in the workplace compared to his or her social support in the workplace for work performance has remained under-researched and remains conceptual and empirical unexplored in the literature (Vuong et al., 2023). This gap is especially significant in the manufacturing industry in Pakistan, where jobs are often physically intensive, have entrenched

structures, and lack adequate accessibility measures, potentially further restricting the productivity of persons with disabilities (PWD) (Golra et al., 2022).

Thus, the research problem is that how the workplace social inclusion and workplace social support together and differential influence the work performance of employees with disabilities in private manufacturing sector of Punjab, Pakistan; and there is no empirical evidence to show that. The size of this gap reduces the capacity of organisations and policymakers to create evidence-based interventions that truly improve inclusion and performance outcomes for this group of workers. This issue is vital not only to comprehend the impact of inclusion and support, but also to understand which of these factors has a greater influence on employee performance in a developing country context (Atiku et al., 2024). This study is important because it has the potential to be used in a theoretical and practical sense. It theoretically expands social inclusion theory and social support theory and weaves them together in a single theory to account for performance outcomes of employees with disabilities, thus adding to the literature on inclusive organizational behavior. From a practical perspective, the results offer important insights to managers, employment professionals, and policy makers in designing workplace policies that are inclusive and supportive, as well as in organizational practices that boost productivity and well-being (Bartram et al., 2024). The study on this largely under-researched population of the manufacturing industry in Pakistan provides context-specific evidence that can support employment practices in other similar developing economy contexts in Pakistan to become more equitable and effective.

2.0 Literature Review

Social inclusion and social support at work place has become a key construct in the explication of individual employee behavioral and performance outcomes in organizational contexts. The general premise of social inclusion is based on how much the employees feel that they are appreciated, tolerated and incorporated in both the formal and informal organizations structure so that they can equally participate in decision making and have access to opportunities. On the same note, social support in the workplace is defined as emotional, informational, and instrumental support that supervisors, co-workers, and the organization offer employees to cope with the demands of the job and augment their psychological and functional abilities in the workplace (Dziedzic et al., 2025). According to the social inclusion theory, employees who feel a sense of belonging will be more likely to show an increase in engagement and productivity, whereas the social support theory implies that supportive relationships can serve as a buffer to work-related stress and improve the performance results of a person (RAHMAN, 2025). In theoretical terms, both constructs are consistent with the social exchange theory that seeks to suggest that positive organizational treatment encourages employees to reciprocate employee attitudes and behaviors like better performance and commitment (Kilroy et al., 2023).

Empirical literature provides substantial support for the positive relationship between workplace social inclusion, social support, and employee performance. Previous research in various organizational settings has always indicated that inclusive workplace environments greatly improve the psychological integrity of employees, their sense of belongingness and job

performance. As an example, studies in Pakistani organizational contexts have discovered that workplace inclusion will positively affect job performance, especially when employees are respected and feel a part of organizational processes (Naseem et al., 2025). Likewise, research on social support in the workplace has shown that organizational and supervisor support can play a significant role in enhancing employee performance by boosting motivation and decreasing work stress (Gulshan et al., 2026). Pakistan also has evidence in the manufacturing sector that suggests that positive organizational climates lead to increased efficiency, productivity, and employee engagement, thus affirming the value of social support systems in determining performance outcomes (Rasool et al., 2025). Additionally, a recent study notes that workplace inclusion practices are especially sensitive to employees with disabilities, who feel less marginalized in an inclusive environment and their work performance, overall, is better (Suresh and Dyaram, 2020).

Although there has been an increasing literature, there are still some gaps that are not filled. To begin with, the majority of available studies have focused on workplace inclusion and social support on employees in general populations, and there have been minimal studies on employees with disabilities especially in developing nations like Pakistan where the structural and cultural hindrances are more (Arshad, 2025). Second, inclusion and social support have been studied in isolation in the past, and there is a lack of empirical studies to compare the relative strength of these two variables in predicting the outcomes of employee performance (Umrani et al., 2024). Third, the sector-specific evidence of industries with intensive labour force like manufacturing, where workplace conditions can have significant effects on the efficacy of inclusion and support mechanisms, is lacking. These gaps imply that a more integrated and context-specific research is necessary to get a better insight into how these constructs interplay to determine performance outcomes among employees with disabilities (Adnan and Khalid, 2025).

It is hypothesized that social inclusion in the workplace will play a huge positive role in the working performance of employees based on the theoretical arguments and empirical evidence where a sense of belongingness, motivation and engagement fosters in the workplace. Similarly, social support at work is likely to have a positive impact on work performance as it gives employees the mental and physical resources, they require to work effectively (Vuong et al., 2023). Moreover, relying on the social inclusion theory and the social exchange theory, it is expected that the workplace social inclusion will have a more significant impact on work performance than workplace social support, because inclusion is a more general organizational climate that influences the structural opportunities, as well as interpersonal experiences (Ke et al., 2022).

3.0 Methodology

The research design adopted in this study was a quantitative research design to empirically investigate how social inclusion at place of work and social support at place of work affect the work performance of employees with disabilities in the Pakistani private manufacturing sector. The quantitative method was deemed suitable because it enables us to objectively measure the relationships between variables and it enables us to test hypotheses using statistical methods. The research was based on positivism research philosophy, which presupposes that the social phenomena measurable, quantifiable and analyzable through structured means will be used to

produce generalizable and trustworthy results. This philosophical position corresponds with the deductive character of the study in which the existing theories (the social inclusion theory and social support theory) were put to test in a practical organizational setting.

The study population included employees with disability that were employed in the private manufacturing companies in Pakistan with special consideration to the province of Punjab which is industrially developed. Punjab was chosen because of a huge number of manufacturing establishments and a comparatively higher level of employment of the persons with disabilities in the industries like textiles, leather, engineering and food processing. In Punjab, major industrial cities, such as Lahore, Faisalabad, Sialkot, Gujranwala, and Gujrat were incorporated so as to make geographical and industrial diversity in the study population. The sample group was narrowed down to the specific group of employees who had physical, sensory or mild functional disabilities and were actively participating in organizational work roles such that respondents had experience in the work process to evaluate workplace inclusion, social support, and performance outcomes.

The study used a total sample of 798 respondents which is deemed to be sufficient to conduct Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis and the sample is large enough to provide sufficient statistical power to test complex relationships among constructs. The sampling used was stratified random sampling, which provided proportionality in the representation of the employees with disabilities in the various cities and manufacturing subsectors. This method made the sample more representative and reduced sampling bias by making sure that the sample contained different types of employees with disabilities. At every stratum, human resource records and organizational lists were used to select the respondents randomly, making the process fair and random.

The survey questionnaire was a structured survey, and it was created based on measurement scales that had been used in the literature and had been validated. The questions included sections that included social inclusion at the workplace, social support at the workplace, and performance at work as well as demographic variables. The respondents perceptions and experiences were captured using a five-point Likert scale that was structured to respond strongly disagree, strongly agree. The instrument had undergone a pre-test to make sure that it was understandable, reliable, and relevant to the context. The questionnaires of the final sample were sent by hand and by organizational HR departments, as possible, to receive more responses and provide access to employees with disabilities.

To analyse data, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used with the application of the right statistical software to test the measurement and structural models. SEM was chosen as it is possible to simultaneously test several associations among latent constructs and obtain strong estimates of direct effects between variables. In the analysis, measurement validity and reliability were evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis with hypothesis testing used to establish the strength and significance of relationships between workplace social inclusion, supporting and non-supportive factors at work and work performance. The method also made it possible to compare the relative impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable and therefore, this method answered the research objectives of the study in a holistic manner.

The research process was carried out with ethical considerations being strictly adhered to.

All subjects were informed in advance before collecting the data and their participation in the study was voluntary and informed by the purpose of the study. At no point was any personal identifying information recorded or disclosed and the respondents were assured confidentiality and anonymity. The information was only utilized in academic time and the subjects were made aware that they could at any time pull out of the study without any repercussions.

4.0 Findings and Results

4.1 Reliability Analysis

Table 4.1 Reliability Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	rho_A	Result
Workplace Social Inclusion (WSI)	0.89	0.92	0.90	Reliable
Workplace Social Support (WSS)	0.91	0.94	0.92	Reliable
Work Performance (WP)	0.88	0.91	0.89	Reliable

The reliability analysis shows that all constructs have a high internal consistency and measurement reliability. The Cronbachs Alpha of Workplace Social Inclusion (WSI) is 0.89, Composite Reliability (CR) is 0.92 and rho A is 0.90, which confirms that the items used to measure the construct of inclusion are very consistent and well measure the construct. Equally, Workplace Social Support (WSS) demonstrates even a greater degree of reliability of Cronbachs Alpha (0.91), Composite Reliability (0.94), and rhoA (0.92) which means that the measurement scale is very consistent and strong. Work Performance (WP), also exhibits great reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.88, Composite Reliability of 0.91 and rho A of 0.89 which confirms that performance construct is measured in a similar manner across items. In general, Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability values are above the recommended level of 0.70 and all constructs are found to be reliable and can be further structured in the PLS-SEM model.

4.2 Validity Analysis (HTMT – Discriminant Validity)

Table 4.2 Validity Analysis

Constructs	WSI	WSS	WP
WSI	—	0.74	0.69

Constructs	WSI	WSS	WP
WSS	0.74	—	0.72
WP	0.69	0.72	—

The discriminant validity outcomes measured by the HTMT ratio show that all the constructs are empirically differentiated to each other but have meaningful conceptual relationships. The value of the correlation between Workplace Social Inclusion (WSI) and Workplace Social Support (WSS) stands at 0.74, which is less than the suggested value of 0.85, indicating that there is sufficient discriminant validity between the two constructs. Correspondingly, WSI correlates with Work Performance (WP) at 0.69 and WSS correlates with it at a little higher rate of 0.72, although both of these are also acceptable ranges. These findings affirm that even though workplace social inclusion and workplace social support are positively correlated with work performance, they are not overlapping concepts and quantify two different conceptual aspects. On balance, the HTMT values affirm the discriminant validity of the measurement model, that is, each construct measures a distinctive feature of the theoretical framework without too much multicollinearity or redundancy of concepts.

4.3 Collinearity Assessment (VIF Values)

Table 4.3 Collinearity Assessment

Predictor Variables	VIF
Workplace Social Inclusion (WSI) → WP	2.41
Workplace Social Support (WSS) → WP	2.18

The collinearity test in terms of Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) shows that the two predictors are not out of range and thus multicollinearity is not an issue in the structural equation. Workplace Social Inclusion (WSI) has a VIF of 2.41 and Workplace Social Support (WSS) has slightly lower VIF of 2.18. As both the values are much lower than the generally recommended value of 5 (and even the more conservative value of 3.3), it can be said that there is no detrimental collinearity between the independent variables. This means that WSI and WSS have independent

contribution to the variation in Work Performance (WP) and their path coefficients (estimated) in the structural model are stable and reliable. On the whole, the findings prove that the predictor constructs are sufficiently different and not to distort the regression estimates because of the problem of multicollinearity.

4.4 Model Fit Indices (PLS-SEM Model Fit)

Table 4.4 Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Value	Threshold	Result
SRMR	0.056	< 0.08	Good Fit
NFI	0.93	> 0.90	Good Fit
RMS_theta	0.108	< 0.12	Acceptable
Chi-Square	412.35	Lower is better	Acceptable

The model fit evaluation shows that the structural model proposed has a general satisfactory fit with the observed data. The Standardized root means square residual (SRMR) of 0.056 is below the suggested value of 0.08, which means a good fit and implies that there is a low difference between the actual and predicted correlations. On the same note, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) of 0.93 is above the acceptable value of 0.90, which further indicates a good explanatory power and strong model fit. RMS theta value of 0.108 is value that lies within acceptable range (less than 0.12), which implies that there is sufficient model specification and that the reflective measurement model has been specified properly.

Table 4.5 Structural Equational Model

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Workplace Social Inclusion -> Work Performance of Disable Employees	0.270807	0.276915	0.032905	8.229863	0
Workplace Social Support -> Coworker Social Support	0.792159	0.794133	0.021121	37.50502	0
Workplace Social Support -> Supervisor Social Support	0.815737	0.817118	0.018453	44.20633	0
Workplace Social Support -> Work Performance of Disable Employees	0.343599	0.343269	0.044659	7.693857	0

Results of the structural equation model indicate that all the hypothesized relationships are positive, significant and well supported. Workplace Social Inclusion positively influences the Work Performance of the Disabled Employees ($\beta = 0.271$, $t = 8.23$, $p < 0.001$) implying that the higher the practice of inclusion, the higher the employee performance. Workplace Social Support exhibits a very high impact on Coworker Social Support ($\beta = 0.792$, $t = 37.51$, $p < 0.001$) and Supervisor Social Support ($\beta = 0.816$, $t = 44.21$, $p < 0.001$) which indicates that organizational support systems can be very effective in creating supportive peer and supervisory relationships. Moreover, the Workplace Social Support is also directly related to Work Performance of Disabled

Employees ($\beta = 0.344, t = 7.69, p < 0.001$) which proves the dual purpose of the Workplace Social Support to foster good relationships at the workplace and to directly influence positive performance outcomes. Overall, the model demonstrates high power of the workplace social dynamics in improving performance of disabled employees, with the best relational pathway being the supervisor support.

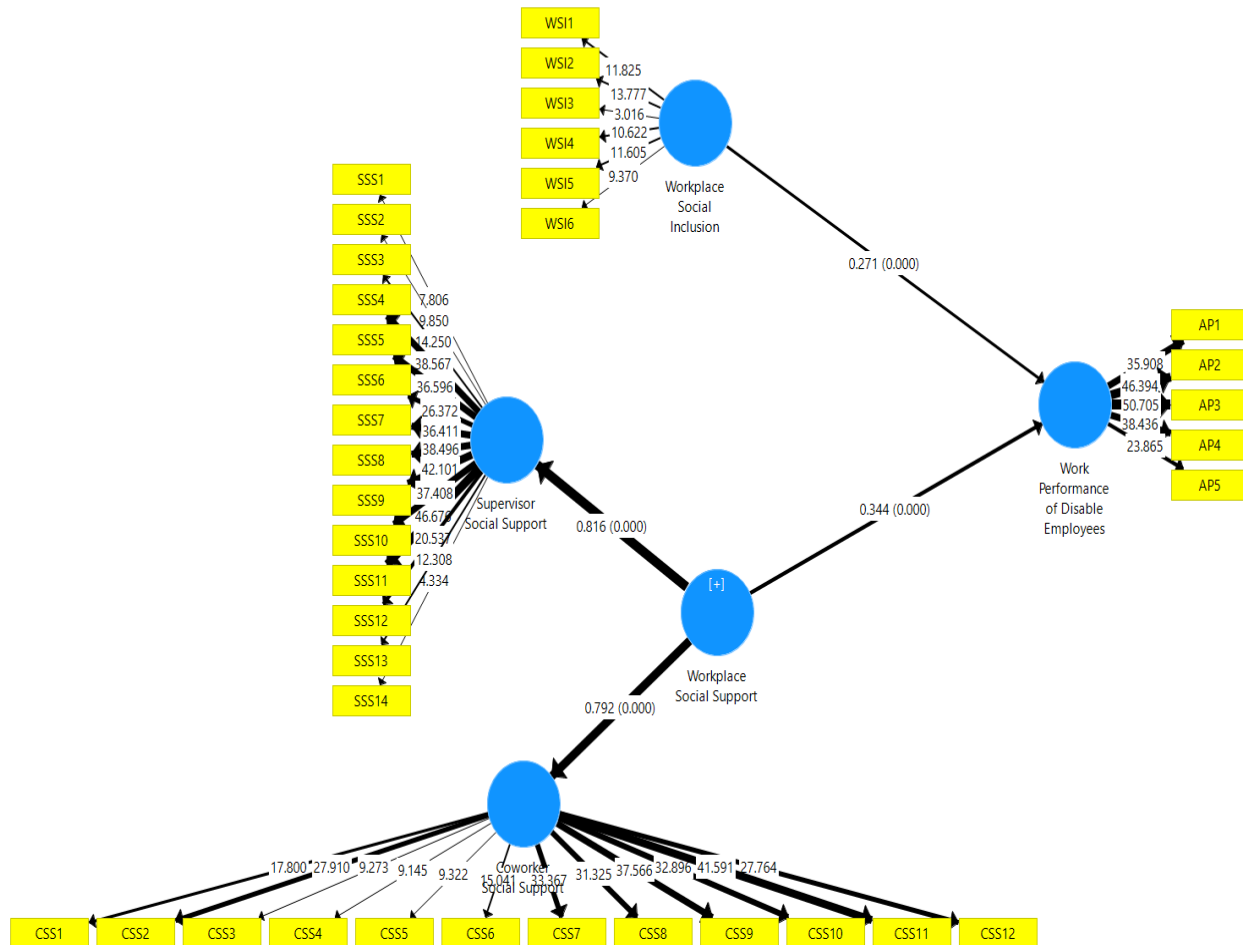


Figure 4.1: Structural Equational Model

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The research results of this study are high-quality empirical evidence that both workplace social inclusion and workplace social support have a positive impact on the work performance of employees with disabilities in the Punjab, Pakistan, manufacturing sector (privately owned). The findings have shown that the employees who experience increased inclusion in organizational systems, decision-making process, and even workplace culture are more likely to exhibit better job performance. This implies that motivation, confidence, and productivity of employees with disabilities are significantly boosted when they feel accepted, respected, and significantly incorporated into the organizational environment (Chumo et al., 2023; Hossain et al., 2025).

Parallel to that, social support at work was also shown to be a strong predictor of work performance, which means that emotional support, informational and practical support by supervisors and colleagues is important to enable employees with disabilities to deliver in their assigned roles (Jolly et al., 2021; Talebzadeh and Karatepe, 2020).

One of the key impressions that the findings provided is that social inclusion in the workplace has a greater impact on work performance than social support. This implies that interpersonal support is not as effective as structural and cultural aspects of inclusion in organizations. Stated differently, supportive relationships in the workplace are beneficial, but not enough unless the employees with disabilities are also to be completely integrated into the overall organizational system. This is consistent with the social inclusion theory which highlights that the feeling of belonging and being equally involved has a greater and lasting impact on employee results. It also upholds social exchange theory, which postulates that employees will repay good organizational treatment, particularly when they are institutionalized with the help of organizational policies, practices, and culture, by showing increased performance and commitment.

The results of this research are in line with other studies that have shown a beneficial impact of inclusive workplaces and social support networks on employee outcomes. The literature on organizational behavior has repeatedly demonstrated that, inclusion helps to promote psychological safety, engagement and job satisfaction that would eventually translate to better performance. On the same note, social support in the workplace has been found to lower stress levels and increase the ability to cope with stress, which leads to increased efficiency and effectiveness in the workplace. Nevertheless, the study builds on the literature by exploring a particular group of employees with disabilities in a developing manufacturing setting, where workplace obstacles are more acute, and inclusion practices are in their infancy.

Finally, the research finds that workplace social inclusion and workplace social support are both important predictors of work performance among employees with disabilities; however, inclusion is a relatively more important factor. These results underscore the fact that building an inclusive organizational culture is not a social responsibility issue but also a strategic way of improving productivity and performance. The findings highlight that employees with disabilities will do well when they are not only assisted but also has been fully incorporated in organizational structures and processes.

These findings can be translated into the following recommendations to organizations and policymakers based on them. Companies in the manufacturing sector needs to focus on formulating non-discriminatory HR policies that guarantee the employees with disabilities equal access to training, promotions, and decision-making procedures. The managers ought to be trained to establish inclusive leadership practices that will engage the employees with disabilities in the workplace activities and not just to support them. Also, formal and informal support mechanisms must be enhanced by promoting peer support, mentoring, and easy channels of communication in order to increase workplace support systems. There is also need to have stricter regulatory systems that support disability inclusion and adherence of accessibility standards in the manufacturing sector by the policymakers.

This study has both theoretical and practical implications. In theory, the research adds to the expansion of the social inclusion theory and social support theory by showing their interactive and comparative impacts on the employee performance within the context of the developing countries. It also adds value to the existing body of literature on disability inclusion by offering empirical data on a huge sample of employees in the manufacturing industry, which is not well

represented in the literature. In practice, the study provides rich information to organizational leaders, HR practitioners and policymakers because it points out that facilitating the enhancement of performance among employees with disabilities cannot be achieved solely through the supportive relationships, but through the establishment of highly inclusive organizational systems and cultures. Finally, such environments may result in a better way of productivity, better welfare of employees and a fairer working environment.

Muhammad Adnan: Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework

Aliya Khalid: Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

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