

Midocean University

College of Management

Master of Business Administration



**The Effectiveness of LinkedIn as a Social Networking Tool for
Employees' Outcomes**

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As of 2024, LinkedIn has developed into the most prominent professional networking site globally, serving 1 billion users (Omnicores Agency, 2024). It allows professionals to create profiles, network, search for jobs, and even follow companies. In various professions and industries, LinkedIn serves as an online résumé, job search engine, and professional development platform. Companies today utilize LinkedIn for talent acquisition and employer branding, while professionals leverage it for networking and gaining industry insights. One striking example is a phenomenon on LinkedIn: 65 million people search for jobs on LinkedIn every week, and a professional is hired every six minutes through LinkedIn, making it easy to see the potential of LinkedIn in employment (LinkedIn Press, 2023). However, now that it has become second nature for professionals to network via social media, it raises some questions: Just how effective are social media sites for helping people succeed in their jobs?

In Saudi Arabia and the general Middle East, there has been a dramatic increase in LinkedIn deployment in recent years. Professionals in the region are utilizing LinkedIn to expand their connections beyond traditional boundaries, access mentorship opportunities, and explore job opportunities abroad. This aligns with international trends and highlights the importance of examining the impact of LinkedIn at a national level. Employers in the region are taking note as well: a number now even actively encourage their employees to keep LinkedIn profiles updated as a form of personal branding, and some even use LinkedIn for corporate outreach and hiring. Given these changes, we need to ask: Does active involvement on LinkedIn yield any tangible benefits for employees (e.g., improved task performance, increased job satisfaction, or even faster career advancement)?

1.1 Problem Statement

However, despite the high levels of LinkedIn use and the intuitive fit of LinkedIn to career, there is mixed evidence on the degree to which LinkedIn is associated with people's labor market outcomes. Although there may be numerous anecdotes, case studies, and success stories related to LinkedIn (such as finding a job through a connection or learning a new skill online), companies and individuals remain skeptical about the platform. **The question addressed by this research is as follows:** Does reaching out to LinkedIn have any effect on employees' job performance, overall happiness, or career advancement? Or is LinkedIn mostly hype, a professional hobby played for fun and with little impact on how well you do your job or where your career goes?

Employers are usually wary of promoting social network use during working hours, worried it will act as a distraction, and worse yet, competitors will poach their talent. On the other side, employees question whether cultivating a profile and networking online is worthwhile. This study aims to address the insufficient evidence regarding the question, drawing on data-driven answers from the relevant literature. By examining LinkedIn, which is experienced as the most professional among social networks, this study aims to separate the professional networking effects from the general use of social media noise.

The research question can be recast as: **To what degree does the use of LinkedIn influence employee positive outcomes (job performance, satisfaction, and career advancement)?** Resolving this will, in part, serve to confirm (or deny) the assumptions made by employees and employers about the platform.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The importance of this study lies in its ability to make a theoretical contribution by providing empirical evidence on the value that LinkedIn can offer to individual careers and organizational life. Key contributions include:

- **Theoretical Implications:** It contributes to the emerging literature on social networking in a professional context, from the perspective of measurability. The study combines elements from social capital theory, human capital theory, and uses and gratifications theory to make sense of results in a way that extends these theoretical frameworks with empirical evidence derived from the context of LinkedIn.
- **Practical Takeaway for Workers:** For workers and job seekers, the findings from the study will indicate whether activities such as networking on LinkedIn or participating in LinkedIn Learning courses are worthwhile. It can help people determine where to allocate their time on LinkedIn (i.e., profile vs. active posting) to achieve their own career goals.
- **Practical Implications for Employers:** Employers and HR departments can obtain an indication whether or not promoting employees to use LinkedIn (for personal branding, networking, etc.) can pay off in terms of employee development or performance. If the use of LinkedIn is associated with improved results, companies can easily incorporate it into their workforce coaching or mentor programs. Conversely, if no strong positive effects are observed, employers may reevaluate their policies regarding the use of LinkedIn on the job.
- **The Middle Eastern Bubble:** Research about the role of LinkedIn in the Middle East, and the likes of it, phenomenon is still in its infancy. This study offers nuanced insights (with the caveat that the sample population is regionally focused), which can inform cross-cultural or regional perspectives on LinkedIn usage in career development practice.

Ultimately, by evaluating the utility of LinkedIn, this work can support practitioners in leveraging LinkedIn for professional purposes and offer them guidelines for developing more effective corporate-level strategies related to professional networking tools. It takes the conversation from "LinkedIn is popular" to "LinkedIn is actually useful (or not) in the following ways...", which is a good thing because (ripped straight from the CEG) "every decision is a new opportunity based on current conditions, not the future."

1.3 Research Objectives

Given the problem that has been explained above, this paper proposes to achieve the objectives as follows:

- **Objective 1:** To analyze the connection between LinkedIn usage and employees' job performance. Have you read? Do you use LinkedIn to improve your job performance?
- **Objective 2:** To what extent are LinkedIn engagement and job satisfaction related? The research aims to determine whether workers who are more engaged on LinkedIn are happier or more fulfilled in their jobs.
- **Objective 3:** Investigate the effect of LinkedIn on career progress outcomes. In particular, the research will aim to determine whether more frequent use of LinkedIn is associated with tangible career benefits (i.e., promotions, new job offers, increased professional opportunities).
- **Objective 4:** Determine what, if any, LinkedIn functions or activities lead to positive impacts. For example, is having a well-written profile enough, or can activities like networking, posting content, or taking LinkedIn Learning courses also be beneficial?

Overall, achieving these goals should help us gain insight into the purpose and utility of LinkedIn in building a successful and fulfilling career.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions are addressed, given the objectives above:

1. RQ1: What is the relationship between the use of LinkedIn and job performance among employees?

To what extent are job performance and use of LinkedIn among employees related, in the sense that: (a) employees who frequently log in to LinkedIn have higher job performance than employees who rarely log in to LinkedIn, and (b) employees who have larger networks and actively share content on LinkedIn have higher job performance than those with fewer LinkedIn relationships who share little or no content?

2. RQ2: What are the links between LinkedIn use and Job satisfaction amongst employees?

@RobLeal: Are people with a lot of LinkedIn activity (networking, groups, etc) more or less satisfied than those with less activity?

3. RQ3: How does LinkedIn utilization affect employees' career advancement?

E.g., are people who use LinkedIn a lot more likely to get a better job, be promoted, or get other career opportunities?

4. RQ4: What particular LinkedIn features or behaviors have a substantial impact on job-related outcomes for employees?

Of the various ways to consume LinkedIn (building your profile, networking, finding jobs, learning from courses, posting content), which is or likely is the most beneficial for work performance, job satisfaction, and future career development?

These are formulated to address the scope of LinkedIn's effectiveness (RQ1-S3) and typically the mechanisms or attributes that contribute to its efficacy (RQ4).

1.5 Research Hypotheses

Based on the literature and logical reasoning, the following hypotheses, related to the research questions, are formulated in the study:

- **Hypothesis 1 (H1):** There is a positive relationship between LinkedIn use and job performance.

Why: If employees obtain knowledge, ideas, or contacts through their use of LinkedIn, it can offer them an edge in how they perform their job. On the other hand, more successful workers may also be more likely to engage in networking. And we are suggesting an association, not yet implying causation.

- **H2:** Increased LinkedIn usage is associated with increased career advancement (promotions, job offers, etc.).

Reason: The more visible and networked you are, the more chances you are going to have for career opportunities. Active users are more likely to receive career advancements or new job offers.

- **H3:** LinkedIn usage and job satisfaction are significantly positively related.

Why: LinkedIn can foster a sense of belonging and shared professional values. And workers who do use it could feel more attached to their field and emboldened professionally, factors that add to job satisfaction in general for their current role.

- **H4:** There are differences in impacts between specific LinkedIn features (e.g., networking, learning courses, job search, content sharing) on outcomes - some features matter more than others.

Reason: Not all LinkedIn uses are created equal. For instance, there may be more direct benefits to being more engaged in using LinkedIn to network or learn new skills (such as receiving a job offer or improving a skill) than using it more passively to browse or occasionally post content. This theory suggests that the ability to network and learn skills on LinkedIn correlates with more positive outcomes than simply being on LinkedIn or passively consuming content.

Such hypotheses will be statistically tested using the survey data. Collectively, they provide a robust test of the overall hypothesis that LinkedIn is effective in impacting employees' work results.

1.6 Review of Past Studies

Additionally, a significant amount of research and articles have been published in recent years examining the role of social media in professional life. However, it appears that work on LinkedIn has just begun. This section presents brief findings from the previous research to provide a context for the present study:

LinkedIn Usage and Employment Outcomes: Several studies suggest a positive correlation between LinkedIn presence and employment opportunities. For example, **Nikolaou (2014)** found that recruiters heavily utilize LinkedIn for identifying potential candidates, vetting them, and selecting from among those who come with references; this suggests that a well-maintained LinkedIn profile could significantly improve one's chances with recruiters. In a paper on the job search behavior of university students, **Chiang & Suen (2015)** found that students who actively used LinkedIn (e.g., through connecting with alums or professionals) found more interview opportunities than their peers who waited for job notices on campus. These studies support the idea that LinkedIn facilitates people's journey through later life by helping them become better known.

Networking and Job Performance: Research has shown that effective networking can significantly enhance a worker's job performance. Scholars have begun to move beyond the simple concept of "richness" and recognize that complexity within an individual's network can reflect greater overall work performance. It is demonstrated by **Wolff & Moser (2009)** that individuals who spend more time networking tend to have higher job performance ratings; This higher job performance may be ascribed to networking that facilitates the acquisition and exchange of knowledge and support. Although this study did not focus specifically on LinkedIn, it provides reason to believe that it does work. More recently, **Davis et.al. (2020)** pointed out that online professional communities act as a platform for knowledge transfer among individuals (including LinkedIn groups). Employees may thereby receive timely advice and improve their work outcomes, a result entirely compatible with Social Capital Theory.

Social Media and Job Satisfaction: The Relationship Between Job Satisfaction and Social Media Is Complex. Some studies (e.g., internal enterprise networks for company-related

message traffic) suggest that staff who integrate work with social networking are more connected to and feel better supported by the company, which in turn improves morale.

Omar & Yusof (2018), when studying the use of social media in Malaysian workplaces, found that as employees used these platforms as learning resources, including LinkedIn, it increased their self-confidence and indirectly their job satisfaction as well, on account that they felt 'in control' of their career progression. However, other reports suggest that overuse of social networking tools can lead to decreased morale. It is perhaps because people are so distracted from their job or do not feel that current opportunities within an organization are good enough; they want out and cannot resist dreaming about how much greener the other side may be (a kind of "grass is always greener" syndrome). So, whether LinkedIn use raises satisfaction or not can depend on how it is used (with a good purpose vs. as an escape).

The quality of LinkedIn profiles and career success: This study examined whether elements of LinkedIn professional profiles are related to recruiters' perceptions, as noted in **Zide, Elman, & Shahani-Denning (2014)**, for instance. This research shows that profiles with more complete information (including a professional photo, detailed work history, endorsements, etc.) tend to attract more recruiter attention and callbacks. It follows that with this in mind, how you use LinkedIn (eg, investing time to build the best possible profile) becomes vitally important. One additional study by **Van Dijck (2013)** highlights that LinkedIn's endorsement and recommendation facilities lend credibility to online profiles— profiles with such endorsements serve as social proof of competence. This aligns with the role of personal branding on LinkedIn.

Professional Networks' Social Exchange: Preliminary research on e-mentoring and exchanges, such as **Benson (2015)**, indicates that professional people who do things like answer questions directly on LinkedIn, or volunteer their time to help junior colleagues through LinkedIn's career advice function will often meet with positive recognition and expand their networks further. This finding is consistent with Social Exchange Theory, which posits that active involvement will ultimately yield benefits. Nevertheless, any quantitative verification is lacking: this is a relatively young field, one rich in qualitative research and small-scale surveys.

Regional and Cultural Considerations: In the Persian Gulf region, Companies are created daily, and competition in this area is intense. **Zeb-Obipi & Ekweozor (2020)** examined

social networking and employee performance in Nigerian banks, finding that professional networking (often via platforms like LinkedIn) significantly predicted both performance indicators, such as signing bonuses or emoluments received at work, quality evaluation scores awarded by customers for service rendered to them, etc., and career progression. Although they are not in a different cultural context, it does show one thing: even in poor, developing countries such as mine, LinkedIn is regarded as an essential tool. In light of anecdotal evidence and HR reports from the Gulf region, LinkedIn is now becoming the primary recruitment channel. However, there are few academic studies representing this phenomenon in different parts of the GCC countries. This research contributes to filling that vacuum by providing data from an Arab background (presumably; I am not certain where in Saudi Arabia it was carried out).

Summary of Gaps: Although the literature contains evidence linking LinkedIn to positive career-related outcomes, gaps remain, as indicated by ontologies THEORY 23, in terms of measuring the relationship between its use and job performance and/or satisfaction. Moreover, in many of these studies, we find that they focus exclusively on student populations or within particular industry sectors. An analysis for cross-industry comparison that includes multiple outcomes simultaneously (in terms of performance, satisfaction, and advancement) is necessary to determine which domain LinkedIn most affects. Additionally, the question “what LinkedIn activities matter most” has received little attention; while existing research suggests a correlation between profile completeness and networking, comparative studies are lacking.

This study builds on the above findings and starts to fill in some gaps by empirically testing LinkedIn’s impact in an integrated model of employee outcomes. By comparing different work cultures using the same tool and employing a varied sample, it adds something new from local and regional cultures that can be of interest to other scholars, particularly those engaged in comparative research on work culture.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

To clarify what influence LinkedIn might have on employee outcomes, the research draws on several theoretical perspectives:

Social Capital Theory: Social Capital theory argues that individuals can access information, support, and opportunities through their networks. LinkedIn, a professional networking platform, can be seen as a tool to help develop Social Capital. If employees connect with colleagues, industry peers, and experts, they potentially increase their social capital. According to this view, individuals with richer networks (i.e., more connections or greater activity on their network) should have a better chance of accessing valuable information and opportunities. That can translate into higher job performance (getting help or advice), career opportunities (being told about job openings by contacts), and even support that makes them more satisfied with their work (feeling part of a professional community). The study will examine whether heavy users of LinkedIn — people who presumably establish more online social capital — experience fewer concomitant costs in outcomes, consistent with this theory.

Human Capital Theory: Human capital refers to the knowledge, expertise, and abilities that workers possess, enhancing their productivity and value in the workplace. LinkedIn offers features that can help develop human capital, such as LinkedIn Learning courses, exposure to industry news and best practices through posts, and groups that share knowledge among professionals. An employee who spends time on LinkedIn may be effectively developing their human capital by learning new things they didn't know before, thereby refreshing their knowledge and skills. Human Capital Theory suggests that this is the kind of investment from which such a return could be expected to show up in improved performance and future benefits. The research will therefore test whether using LinkedIn as a way to learn something new or improve one's skills correlates with increased productivity or career prospects, as an illustration of that route.

Uses and Gratifications Theory: This view, derived from the general approach in mass communication studies, posits that people actively choose to use particular media (or media channels) to satisfy their specific needs or gratifications. Applying this to LinkedIn, for example, employees might utilize the platform to meet needs such as networking (social

needs), career advancement (self-actualization or economic needs), and professional gender and acceptance (esteem needs). Thus, if LinkedIn can satisfy these needs, one might expect high usage to be accompanied by positive feelings, such as job satisfaction (because you feel connected with other people and are recognized for contributing to the organization) and results (e.g., staying in a job because it provides more professional fulfillment). This theory also provides a framework for understanding why employees initially adopt LinkedIn. For the survey in question, the questionnaire asks what the primary purposes are of using LinkedIn. This may offer some insight into the needs that users feel they must satisfy (such as finding job opportunities, learning, or networking). We will later compare this feedback with the actual outcomes that occur later on as a result.

Social Exchange Theory: Social Exchange Theory, as applied within the organization, posits that relationships and involvement in exchanges in which people invest time and effort are expected to yield specific outcomes (not always just in transactions, but generally speaking). With LinkedIn, if an employee actively shares content and helps others (e.g., by introducing someone or making a supportive public comment), this may hint at what their payback might be: recognition from others in the form of recommendations or job leads, a boost to status among peers, etc. It's like sowing seed in fertile soil: whatever you put in must surely come out again. We could theorize that employees who participate more (i.e., actively post, comment, and endorse others) receive more benefits than those who are passive consumers of content. This view will therefore serve as a framework for understanding the differences in outcomes between individuals who are active on LinkedIn and those who use it occasionally.

What these theoretical frameworks give to the study is expectations and interpretation. For example, if we found that LinkedIn usage correlates with career advancement, it could be explained by Social Capital (networks providing opportunities) and Human Capital (learning leading to advancement). If we find that only certain activities matter, Social Exchange might explain why (only those who actively give to the network see returns). If job satisfaction is linked, Uses and Gratifications could explain that LinkedIn fulfills some social/professional needs, leading to contentment.

By situating the study within these theories, its analysis is not only able to measure correlations but also to explain LinkedIn's impact on employees, explaining why and how

it occurs. This theoretical basis will be revised in the Discussions chapter, considering which theories are supported or require modification based on the results.

1.8 Research Methodology

To achieve the objectives, this investigation employs a quantitative research design, focusing on a survey. The methodology is summarized as follows:

Research Design: The investigators employed a cross-sectional survey design, in which participants were asked eligible questions at a single survey point. This structure is suitable for assessing the relationship between LinkedIn and employee outcomes, as patterns and associations in the responses can be analyzed.

Participants: The study population will consist of professionals who are employed and have a LinkedIn account. Our sampling strategy is purposive (ensuring that our participants are users of LinkedIn), and we hope to capture an all-around mix of industries, years of experience, and job roles. The target was to receive approximately 150–250 first responses to obtain a sample for statistical analysis (in fact, the sample achieved was slightly less, as we see in Chapter Four).

• **Data collection:** A questionnaire was designed (see Appendix to the English and Arabic versions). It consists of categories such as demographics (age, gender, experience, industry), LinkedIn usage patterns (frequency, purpose, type of LinkedIn interactions), and perceived results (self-assessed impact on work performance, career development, job satisfaction, etc.). Adams's LIABILITY OBLIGATION PERCEPTION SCALE. Most items measure perception using 5-point agreement scales (ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Agree Strongly"). Also, a yes/no item inquires about whether the participant has ever received a job offer or promotion through LinkedIn.

• **Method of Data Analysis:** Data were analyzed by using the statistical package for social science (SPSS). Summary statistics (means and frequencies) describe usage patterns and characteristics of the respondents. H1–H3 are tested using Pearson correlations to analyze the relationships between LinkedIn usage intensity and dependent variables, such as performance or satisfaction. Tests of H1–H3 are more stringent ($n_{\text{controls}} = 28$, $n_{\text{cases}} = 40$) using regression analysis (multiple linear regression for metric-dependent variables and logistic regression for binary-

dependent variables), while controlling for possible confounders (e.g., years of experience, age). Furthermore, subgroup analysis and comparison statistics (t-tests or ANOVA) are employed to explore H4. For example, those who use LinkedIn primarily for networking are compared with those who use it primarily for learning, and so on. The reliability of any multi-item scale (e.g., the Perceived LinkedIn Impact Scale) can be assessed via Cronbach's alpha to ensure equivalence.

- **Ethical Concerns:** Respondents were volunteers with an option for anonymity. An electronic informed consent was provided at the start of the questionnaire, informing participants about the nature of the study and reassuring respondents that their responses would be confidential and used solely for research purposes. Only demographic data were collected, and no personally identifiable information is retained or published.

This approach allows structured data collection and analysis appropriate to the research questions. It has its limitations (e.g., self-reported data and a cross-sectional design that does not permit causal claims). Still, it is a suitable strategy for planning an exploratory examination of LinkedIn's effectiveness on a large scale.

1.9 Research Design

This study employs quantitative, correlational research methods, utilizing a survey approach. Our primary objective is to determine the extent to which LinkedIn use (independent variable) is associated with various employee outcomes, including job performance, job satisfaction, and career success (dependent variables). A structured questionnaire was formulated and utilized to collect data on these variables. The design is cross-sectional, meaning that the observation is taken at a single point in time.

Justification of Design: A survey design is suitable for accessing a broad sample of workers and for collecting standardized data on perceptions and self-reported outcomes. The correlational nature is fitting for the purpose, since one aims to evaluate relations (or, respectively, testing hypotheses on associations) and not to demonstrate causality. It just isn't feasible to experiment in this case (you can't assign people randomly to 'use LinkedIn' or not for several years), so a non-experimental survey is your best opportunity to gather real-world data.

Structured Instrument: Uniform questions are asked of each respondent to allow comparison of responses. Because the variables we are interested in are largely subjective (e.g., self-rated performance, perceived impact of LinkedIn on career), a survey with Likert scales and categorical responses can be a suitable method for measuring these perceptions.

Data Analysis Plan: The design includes a data plan, which means that the questionnaires are coded and entered into SPSS after data collection is complete. The plan (outlined in Section 3.6) is first to run descriptive statistics, followed by bivariate correlation analyses for hypotheses H1–H3, and then conduct follow-up multiple regression analyses to explore these hypotheses while covarying for demographic factors. Regarding H4, we will use comparative tests (ANOVA/t-tests) to examine whether usage categories (e.g., why people use LinkedIn) affect the uptake of the outcome measures. We will also consider a multiple regression model that includes dummy variables for the different activities.

Validity Considerations: The structure is designed to counteract validity threats. For example, many questions in the survey were adapted from literature (see, for example, Section 3.4, Validity) – this supports content validity. The bilingual format of the

questionnaire (English and Arabic side by side) aimed to minimize language comprehension errors and enhance construct validity for Arabic speakers.

To conclude, the study design is devised to effectively investigate the hypotheses and address the research questions by collecting sound data from the target population through a well-planned and systematic approach. Although it cannot infer causality or eliminate all self-report bias, it is a practical and ethical approach to investigating the research question.

2.0 Research Limitations

There are limitations to consider for this study:

- **Subjective Data:** This research is based on the self-reports of the performance, satisfaction, and use of LinkedIn by the respondents. It's also the kind of data that can be prone to bias — for example, people may overestimate how much credit they deserve for their success on LinkedIn, or how much they use LinkedIn overall, simply because it makes them appear more successful. On the other hand, some respondents may underreport usage if they perceive social media use as sensitive. The richness of interpretation depends on candid and self-interested responses.
- **Cross-Sectional Design:** Because information was collected at a single point in time, it is not possible to determine cause-and-effect relationships. Therefore, when we observe a relationship between LinkedIn usage and a particular outcome, we can't be certain whether LinkedIn use is causing a positive result or if those who are already performing well (high performers or highly satisfied individuals) are simply more inclined to use LinkedIn. To investigate this question more fully, a longitudinal study is necessary to capture changes over time and better infer causality.
- **Small Number of Final Respondents and Sample Method:** The ability to generalize the results is limited by the small final sample size (approximately 50 completed questionnaires, somewhat less than the initial target), as well as by the use of purposive sampling. The respondents may not be entirely representative of all employees or LinkedIn users — for instance, individuals who were particularly interested in LinkedIn's impact may have been more inclined to respond. Such jumping around could bias the results (either inflating estimates of effects or focusing too much on particular industries). The sample size is also relatively small, which means some real effects may fail to meet statistical significance (a type II error).
- **Geographic/Cultural Context:** Considering that the results were mainly from a specific part of the world (e.g., Saudi Arabia or the Middle East), the findings may

represent regional usage or work culture differences. The influence of LinkedIn will vary based on the region's penetration of the platform or networking norms. Accordingly, care should be taken in extending conclusions across countries.

- **Omitted variables:** This study looks at only LinkedIn and a myriad of factors that affect performance and advancement (e.g., personality, employer support, the economic environment). Some of those things the survey doesn't catch. For instance, an outgoing personality could lead someone to both spend a lot of time on LinkedIn and perform well at work — a common cause — which might skew interpretation. We attempted to include controls for experience level, as well as age, but there may be other factors at play that we're not accounting for here.

- **Outcome Specificity:** Job performance was self-rated, and opportunities and perceptions were self-reported indicators of career advancement. Some of this nuance is not accommodated by our proxies (for example, we do not have supervisor performance evaluations or the destination of actual promotions). Job satisfaction was one of the planned measures. Still, as noted, through oversight or design decision, a direct satisfaction scale was omitted from the final version of the survey, which limits our ability to make a definitive conclusion on that front.

Recognizing these constraints enables the reader to keep the study's findings in perspective. We will present the results with these caveats in mind, and recommendations for future work will include addressing some of these limitations (e.g., increasing power, incorporating additional metrics, conducting longitudinal studies).

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