



Community and national resilience and their predictors in face of terror



Shaul Kimhi ^{a,*}, Hadas Marciano ^b, Yohanan Eshel ^c, Bruria Adini ^d

^a Stress and Resilience Research Center, Tel-Hai College, Israel

^b Stress and Resilience Research Center, Tel-Hai College, The Ergonomics and Human Factors Unit, University of Haifa, Israel

^c Stress and Resilience Research Center, Tel Hai and University of Haifa, Israel

^d Head of the Department of Emergency Management and Disaster Management School of Public Health | Sackler Faculty of Medicine, Tel Aviv University, Israel

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted following a recent military clash between the Israeli Defense Forces and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad terror organization in Gaza Strip (17–18 November). A random internet sample of 508 residents of the southern area (Gaza Envelope) was employed to determine the impact of this extreme experience on their community and national resilience. The findings were compared with a previous study that was conducted among a national sample. Results indicated that the average community resilience of the southern participants was significantly higher compared to the national sample, while the national resilience of the present sample was significantly lower compared with the national sample. Unexpectedly, feelings of danger were found to be associated with higher community resilience. Psychological variables predicted both community and national resilience better than the demographic variables of the participants.

1. Background

The recent clash between the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad terror organization forces in Gaza Strip, in November 2019, started with the killing of a senior commander of the Islamic Jihad group. Hundreds of rockets were then fired at the Jewish settlements bordering this strip (Gaza Envelope) in retaliation. Although the vast majority of these rockets were destroyed in mid-air, they resulted in massive Israeli bombings. The present study focuses on community resilience (CR) and the national resilience (NR) of civilians living in the Gaza Envelope (up to 40 km from the border), following these hostilities.

1.1. Individual resilience

Bonanno and Mancini [1] have claimed that most people experience more than one harsh occurrence in their lifetime, which may be perceived by them as a traumatic event. Coping with experienced adversities, crises and calamities require individual resilience [2]. It was observed that both adversity and positive adaptation must be evident for resilience to be demonstrated. According to Bonanno, Romero, and Klein [3], resilience combines protective factors which modify, ameliorate or alter a person's response to an environmental hazard that

predisposes to a maladaptive outcome, whereas Masten (2018, p.16) regards it as “the capacity of a system to adapt successfully to significant challenges that threaten the function, viability, or development of the system” [4]; p. 16).

1.2. Community resilience

Community resilience (CR) is acquired after a disaster, that is, “a potentially traumatic event that is collectively experienced has an acute onset and is time delimited; disasters may be attributed to natural, technological, or human causes” [5]; p. 4). CR refers to a community's ability to cope with stressful conditions, such as natural adversities or man-made calamities, and to recuperate after them. CR has been defined accordingly as “the capability to anticipate risk, limit impact, and bounce back rapidly through survival, adaptability, evolution, and growth in the face of turbulent change” [6]; or as a “process linking a set of networked adaptive capacities to a positive trajectory of functioning and adaptation” [7]. These authors have recommended that community-level adaptation should be understood as “population wellness”: A high prevalence of wellness in the community is defined as high and non-disparate levels of mental and behavioral health, role functioning, and quality of life in a given population. They have suggested further that community resilience-resources have three dynamic

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: shaulkim@telhai.ac.il (S. Kimhi), hmarcia1@univ.haifa.ac.il (H. Marciano), yeshel@psy.haifa.ac.il (Y. Eshel), adini@tauex.tau.ac.il (B. Adini).

properties: *robustness* (the ability to withstand stress without suffering degradation), *redundancy* (the extent to which elements are substitutable in the event of disruption or degradation), and *rapidity* (the capacity to achieve goals on time to contain losses and avoid disruption). They have also claimed that each of these properties may be enough to generate community resilience in the face of a distressing event (see also, [8]).

A recent Israeli study [9] has employed regressions to identify predictors of CR in a large sample of kibbutz residents along the Israeli-Lebanese border. One regression identified ‘trust in the local authorities’ as well as a sense of safety at home as such predictors, while another regression identified ‘political attitudes’ and ‘income’ as further protectors. An additional study pointed at three demographic attributes as significant predictors of CR among an Israeli Jewish sample: religiosity, family income, and age, as well as three psychological predictors: fear of war, previous exposure to terror, and a sense of coherence (Marciano, [10]).

Examination of CR of twelve neighborhoods in New York and New Jersey severely affected by Super Storm Sandy indicated that people living in communities with higher social cohesion, informal social control, and social exchange, have been more likely to believe their neighborhoods are very well prepared for a disaster [11].

1.3. National resilience

The concept of national resilience (NR) is a broad one, addressing issues of social sustainability and strength in several diverse realms [12]. In any case, NR is the consequence of successful national adjustment and functioning efficiently following potentially traumatic events. Canetti, Waismel-Manor, Cohen, and Rapaport [13] have claimed accordingly that NR should be defined as the nation’s ability to cope successfully with its adversities (such as poverty, terrorism, or corruption) while keeping its social fabric intact. On the other hand, such resilience might be reflected in readjusting and adapting in new and innovative ways, such as behavioral adaptations that help “close the gap” between the current strain and the nation’s needs and abilities [14]. This author has stated that one advantage of studying national resilience lies in the possibility to explore and compare how citizens of two terror-experienced democracies, like the United States and Israel, define their perceived national resilience. Similarities and differences in these perceptions may lead to a cross-cultural definition of national resilience applicable to other countries. CR and NR pertain to two different domains. However, generally, CR and NR substantially correlate with each other. Previous Israeli studies indicated small positive correlations between pairs of these three resiliencies (individual resilience, CR, and NR, see Ref. [15]).

Predictors of NR [16] have shown that religiosity, political attitudes, and income constituted demographic predictors of NR, whereas a sense of coherence was a psychological predictor of both CR and NR. Marciano et al. [17] have found similarly that both CR and NR have been predicted by religiosity, political attitudes, age, and family income, as well as by three psychological variables: fear of war, previous exposure to terror, and a sense of coherence.

These findings and the parallel results achieved for predictors of CR have raised an important theoretical and practical question: are these modes of resilience better predicted by demographic or by psychological variables.

1.4. Sense of danger

Lazarus and Folkman [18] have claimed that a sense of danger, that is, perceived post-adversity distress and the resources available to the individual to deal with the adversity, reflect a cognitive assessment. This cognitive appraisal strongly influenced the reaction to adversities [19]. A low sense of danger has been associated with a higher postwar recovery, life satisfaction, and fewer distress symptoms among adolescents

[20]. These authors have argued that a major issue about feelings of danger is their duration. They may persist for a long time after the disappearance of the threatening factors. In the current study, we assumed that the sense of danger would negatively predict the two investigated modes of resilience and. We also assumed that sense of danger would be higher among the southerner’s sample, which experienced massive rocket fire shortly before, compared with the national sample that was examined during a relatively quiet period in 2018.

1.5. Sense of security

The individual sense of security has been studied mainly in the field of attachment (e.g., Ref. [21]). However, later on, it has been referred to as a response to threats. Murayama, Fujihara, Saito, and Nishioka [22] have thus defined a sense of security as the sensation of individuals that they were somehow protected from adversity despite the insecure environment that they lived in. We hypothesized that the investigated civilians of the current study would feel that they were secure in the midst of a military clash.

It should be noted that the two investigated resiliencies are based on general feelings of identification, trust in the authorities and their good intentions, and hopes for a better future at the local and the national levels, rather than on established facts. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that psychological beliefs and feelings of the current study’s participants will predict these resiliencies to a greater extent than their demographic characteristics.

The following hypotheses were studied: 1. Terror acts have occurred all over Israel for many years. We hypothesized, therefore, that the levels of CR and NR of the participants will not differ significantly from their national averages. Nonetheless, we expect that ‘sense of danger’ will be higher among the southern sample compared with the national average. 2. CR and NR will be predicted by demographics as well as psychological variables. However, regression analyses would show that the psychological variables will account for a greater part of the explained variance of each of these resiliencies.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The present study is based on a random internet sample of 508 Jewish participants who live in a distance of up to 40 km from Gaza Strip, who have agreed to participate in this research. They are characterized by a wide range of demographic attributes (See Table 1). The data have been collected by the iPanel Company that consists of the largest internet panel in Israel of over 100,000 listed. All data was gathered anonymously, following approval of the IRB of the Tel Aviv University (for the reliability and validity of the on-line questionnaire, see Ref. [23]).

2.2. Instruments

Community resilience. The short form CCRAM measure pertaining to CR [24] has been employed. Its 10 items are rated by a scale ranging from 1 = Does not agree at all, to 5 = Very much agrees. The current Cronbach’s alpha reliability of this scale is $\alpha = 0.91$.

National resilience. The NR-13 instrument [25] pertaining to trust in national leadership, patriotism, coping with national crises, and belief in social justice, has measured NR. Its 13 items have been rated by a scale ranging from 1 = Does not agree at all, to 6 = Very much agrees. Cronbach’s alpha reliability of this resilience in the present study is $\alpha = 0.88$.

Four psychological variables have been included in the current study.

Sense of danger. This scale pertains to the level of the individual, social, and national sense of danger [26]. The original scale consists of

Table 1
Distribution of demographic attributes of the present sample ($N = 508$)

Variable	Rating scale	Number of respondents	Percent	Mean (S.D.)
Age	18–30	181	36	38.14
	30–40	145	28	(13.24)
	40–60	143	28	
	61+	39	8	
Gender	1-males	255	50	
	2-females	253	50	
Level of religiosity	1-Non religious	255	50	1.75
	2-traditional	145	28	(.87)
	3-religious	90	18	
	4-very religious	18	4	
Family income compared to a national average	1-much lower	124	24	2.39
	2-lower	152	30	(1.07)
	3-average	154	30	
	4-higher	64	13	
	5-much higher	14	3	
Political attitudes	1-extreme left	3	1	3.57
	2-left	53	10	(.845)
	3-center	158	31	
	4-right	237	47	
Education	5-extreme right	57	11	
	1-elementary	4	1	3.31
	2-high school	135	27	(1.02)
	3-high school+	134	26	
Familial status	4-Bachelor deg.	172	34	
	5-Master degree+	63	12	
	1-single	107	21	
	2-married	330	65	
Number of children	3-divorced	28	5	
	4-widow	5	1	
	5-partner hood	38	7	
	1-no children	163	32	2.41
Distance of home from the border	2-one child	61	12	(1.14)
	3-2 to 3	206	41	
	4-4 to 5	63	12	
	5-6+	13	3	
Type of community	1- to 0 to 7	110	22	2.19
	2- 8 to 20	251	49	(.93)
	3- 21 to 30	68	13	
	4- 31 to 40	63	13	
1-kibbutz	2-moshav	42	8	
	3-other small settlements	12	2	
	4-a small town (up to 10,000)	10	2	
	5-A medium town (10,000–50,000)	111	22	
6-A big town (over 50,000)	266	53		

In a small number of variables, the number of respondents is slightly lower than all respondents due to missing data.

five items but the current scale includes three additional items: “Do you believe that the Holocaust may happen again?”, “To what extent do you believe that a war will erupt on Israel’s northern border?”, and “To what extent do you believe that a war will erupt on Israel’s southern border?”. These eight items are rated by a scale ranging from 1 = Not at all, to 5 = Very much. The scale’s Cronbach’s alpha reliability in this study is $\alpha = 0.83$.

Sense of safety at home. This variable is assessed by a single item: “How protected do you feel at home in case of war?”. This item has been rated by a scale ranging from 1 = Very little to 5 = Very much.

Governmental support. a. Perceived level of governmental support provided to the residents of the south *during* the last military clash has been assessed by a single item: “To what extent did you feel that the state of Israel is supporting and helping the southern residents during the last round of rocket fire?”. This item has been rated by a scale ranging from 1 = Very little to 5 = Very much.

b. Perceived level of governmental support provided to residents of the south *between* military clashes have been assessed by a single item:

“To what extent did you feel that the state of Israel is supporting and helping the southern residents between rounds of rocket fire?”. This item has been rated by a scale ranging from 1 = Very little to 5 = Very much.

Demographic variables. Respondents have stated eight demographic variables: age (18–30, 31–40, 41–60, 60+), gender (1 = male, 2 = female), level of religiosity (1 = non-religious, to 4 = very religious), family income (1 = much lower than the national average, to 5 = much higher than the national average), political attitudes (1 = extreme left, to 5 = extreme right), level of education (1 = elementary, to 5 = graduate degree and over), familial status (single, married, divorced, couple), number of children (no children, to 4 children or more). Two other demographic characteristics are based on the Central Bureau of Statistics: the distance of your living place from the border, and the type of community that the participant lives in Ref. [27]. Table 1 presents the distribution of these attributes in the present sample.

3. Results

As a first step, we have calculated Pearson correlations among the research variables (Table 2). Results indicate the following: (a) Being a female and living closer to the border in a smaller community, are positively correlated with higher CR. (b) Older age, a higher level of religiosity, more right-wing political attitudes, and having more children, are significantly correlated with a higher level of NR. (c) A lower level of NR, younger age, being a female, lower family income, more right-wing political attitudes, lower education, closer distance to the border and living in a larger community, is significantly correlated with a higher level of sense of danger. (d) Higher indices of resilience (CR and NR), a lower sense of danger, a higher family income and more children are significantly correlated with higher feelings of sense of safety at home. However, it should be noted that there are no indications that a lower level of family income means a lower level of private or community shelters.

3.1. CR, NR, and sense of danger in the Gaza Envelope compared to the national average

Table 3 presents the levels of CR, NR, and sense of danger of the present sample, as compared to their levels in a national sample, which have been obtained in 2018 using a national internet sample ($N = 1100$) [17]. These data do not confirm our first hypothesis regarding CR and NR. In contrast to our prediction, both NR and CR of the southern Gaza Envelope investigated sample were significantly different from those of

Table 2
Pearson correlations between psychological and demographic variables.

Variables	Community resilience	National resilience	Sense of danger	Sense of safety at home
Community resilience	–	.469***	.080	.270***
National resilience		–	-.089*	.348***
Sense of danger			–	-.167***
Age	-.033	.110*	-.139**	.040
Gender	.148***	-.044	.209***	-.072
Religiosity	.049	.244***	.024	.062
Family income	.000	.081	-.226***	.181***
Political attitudes	.030	.191***	.125**	.060
Education	-.044	-.031	-.163***	.038
Family status	.006	.054	-.057	-.014
Num. of children	.058	.176***	-.081	.100*
Border distance	-.188***	.038	-.198***	-.023
Type of community	-.264***	.010	.130**	-.003

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 3

Comparing the CR, NR, and sense of danger of Gaza Envelope residents and a national sample: Distribution and *t*-test.

Community resilience						
Level	Responses range	Gaza Envelope sample 2019 (N = 508)		National sample 2018 (N = 1100)		
		respondents	%	respondents	%/t	
Low	1–2	31	6	127	11	
Medium-low	2+ - 3	132	26	397	36	
Medium-high	3+ - 4	223	44	428	39	
High	4+ - 5	122	24	148	14	
Mean		3.44		3.11		
Standard deviation		.83		.86		
<i>t</i> -test for independent samples: a comparison between the two samples.				<i>t</i> = 7.23***		
National resilience (scale 1–6)						
Level	Responses range	respondents		%/t		
		respondents	%	respondents	%/t	
Very low	1–2	17	3	36	3	
Low	2+ - 3	103	21	141	13	
Medium	3+ - 4	227	44	378	34	
High	4+ - 5	145	29	424	38.5	
Very high	5+ - 6	16	3	121	11	
Mean		3.62		3.95		
Standard deviation		.81		.92		
<i>t</i> -test for independent samples: a comparison between the two samples.				<i>t</i> = -6.94***		
Sense of danger (scale 1–5)						
Level	Responses range	respondents		%/t		
		respondents	%	respondents	%/t	
Low	1–2	84	16	295	27	
Medium-low	2+ - 3	234	46	537	49	
Medium-high	3+ - 4	153	30	235	21	
High	4+ - 5	37	7	33	3	
Mean		2.84		2.58		
Standard deviation		.80		.74		
<i>t</i> -test for independent samples: a comparison between the two samples.				<i>t</i> = -3.17**		

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

the national averages. The NR level of the investigated sample has been found to be significantly lower and their CR significantly higher than the national average. Nevertheless, the data confirm our first hypothesis regarding a sense of danger: The south sample reported a higher level of sense of danger.

3.2. Psychological and social aspects of resilience: a synthesis of risks and resources

Using path analysis, we have examined which of the demographic and psychological variables significantly predict CR and NR when their effects are controlled for each other. Results indicate the following (Table 4 and Fig. 1): (a) The four psychological predictors (sense of safety at home, sense of danger, governmental support for the southern residents during the last clash and support between the clashes) predict CR and NR and their predictions were generally higher than the demographic predictors (religiosity, age, and type of community). (b) Sense of safety at home significantly predicts CR and NR: the higher the sense of security the more resilience is reported. (c) A higher sense of danger significantly predicts the level of CR, but not of NR. (d) A feeling that the Israeli government has supported the Gaza envelope's residents during the last clash positively predicts their level of CR and NR. (e) A feeling that the Israeli government has supported Gaza envelope's residents between the clashes, positively predicts the level of NR. (f) A

Table 4

Path analyses with standardized estimates for seven predictors of CR and NR.

Predictor	Path (Standardized regression weights)		Variables
	Dependent variables		
	CR	NR	
Sense of safety at home	.271***	.235***	Psychological
Sense of danger	.183***	-.027	
Perceived governmental support during the last clash	.187**	.232***	
Perceived governmental support between the clashes	.063	.161**	
Religiosity	.065	.175***	Demographic
Age	-.018	.168*	
Type of community	-.288***	-.046	
R ²	.25	.30	

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

higher level of religiosity and older age predict a higher level of NR. (g) Living in a smaller community predicts higher CR. (h) The seven predictors account for 25% of CR and 30% of NR explained variance.

4. Discussion

It has been argued that the continuous experiences of Israelis with wars and acts of terror have strengthened their NR, patriotism, and their belief in Israel's ability to withstand these adversities [36]. Consequently, Israelis generally score high on NR. However, in disagreement with hypothesis 1, relatively lower NR has been found among the southern sampled residents compared with the national average. Most of the residents of the Gaza Envelope are religious and support right-wing parties more than left-wing ones (see Ref. [28]). Consequently, in Israel's terms, they are expected to score higher on NR, as the religious and right-wing parties have been in the governing coalition in the past decade. Nevertheless, many of them complain that the government does not help them sufficiently in times of clashes, nor between terror attacks. The negative associations of these complaints with NR may explain the somewhat lower national resilience score of this sample.

The finding that the residents of the Gaza Envelope have shown a higher community resilience level than the general Israeli population, is not in agreement with our first hypothesis. Higher community resilience has been attributed in several previous studies to living in small settlements whose members enjoy a higher social cohesion, and informal social exchange [11]; or to a high sense of pride in one's small community, feelings of belongingness, and informal interpersonal relations [29]. However, these factors cannot explain the higher CR scores of the present sample since 75% of the present sample live in medium-size or large cities. We assume that the higher CR in the Gaza Envelope may be explained by the special role played by the sense of danger in this context. As could have been expected, the southern sample reported a higher level of sense of danger, and sense of danger has negatively predicted NR of the current sample, but at the same time, it has positively predicted CR in the present sample. In the psychological literature, a sense of danger is a negative consequence of fear and anxiety [30], which is negatively correlated with community resilience [17]. The present participants have managed to transform these negative feelings into an indicator of resilience: the greater the danger faced, the greater the CR experienced. We are aware of clinical cases which have transformed a sense of danger and risk factors and made them contribute to the enhancement of one's life, and for increasing individual resilience [31]. Rather than trying to deny their sense of danger they have succeeded in converting it into a declaration of unison which supports their belief in their communities' ability to hold on despite the threats of terror.

Though the former claim may explain our findings, there may be another explanation for the positive link between community resilience and perceptions of danger. This link may be the claim that a sense of

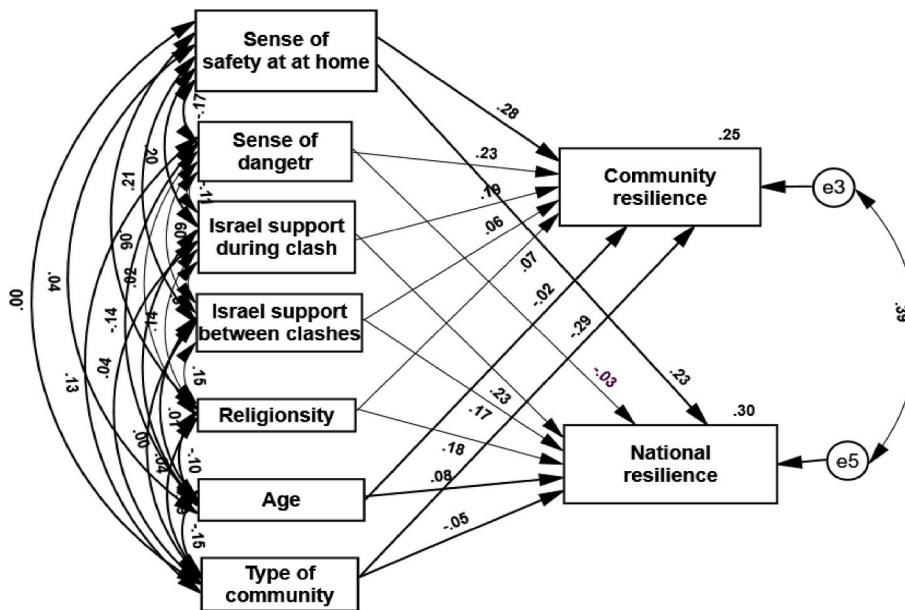


Fig. 1. Path analysis of psychological and demographic predictors of CR and NR.

danger caused by the continuing uncertainty of the communities around the Gaza Strip may reinforce the importance of the community and its support for those who belong to it. It may also provide real opportunities for the community to offer support to its members and become an important entity in their lives. For example, Coaffee and Rogers [32] have exemplified how cities that have been a target to a terror attack can change and become more resilient. However, we are not aware of a previously published result in which a sense of danger has enhanced community resilience. This issue should be further examined in future studies.

An earlier study of Gaza Envelope residents [33] has suggested a serious social change, to provide these residents with the fortitude needed to cope with the difficulties created by the Israeli-Arab conflict, and for coping with the stressful conditions experienced by them. For example, empowerment of the local leadership, increasing community cohesion, developing an experience of community "togetherness", as well as further preparing these communities, which have been coping with terror for decades, for an emergency.

One of the most important present findings, which replicates those of a previous Israeli study, is that psychological variables are better predictors of community and national resilience than the demographic characteristics of the participants [34]. More specifically, the more secure people feel themselves, the more resilient they regard their community and their country [9]. For example, our study indicates that the higher sense of danger, the lower the sense of safety at home. One way to explain this result is to claim that people who feel at danger also perceive their homes as less safe places. This finding is important since feelings about current events have a better chance of being changed than demographic characteristics. Furthermore, such a change is possible since such feelings of security can be further developed. Recent data of the role of trust in enhancing CR and NR [9], indicate that trust in the local authority and believing that these authorities will do their utmost to guarantee one's security (e.g., shelters and safety rooms), and the security of one's family members, positively contribute to CR and NR.

Previous data emphasized the importance of trusting the local authorities for a higher sense of CR. The present data goes further indicating the importance of the perceived attitude of the government towards its citizens. Even if the government is perceived as neglecting its citizens in times of war or anticipated war, this perception does not destroy NR. However, perceived support in these times of need strengthens both CR and NR. Such support indicates that the higher

perception of the authorities' care for them enhances peoples' CR. Furthermore, citizen's perception of caring by the government correlates to a wider sense of mutuality between the individual and the state.

4.1. Limitations and conclusions

The first limitation of this study concerns the internet sample on which this study is based, as we cannot guarantee that it is a representative sample of the population in the South, even though the sample is large and includes a broad distribution of demographic variables. The other limitation to be noted is the fact that our research is correlational and does not allow causality inference.

Nonetheless, the present data strongly supports the contention that changing psychological variables such as a sense of security might improve CR as well as NR in the face of terror. One advantage of the present study is the comparison of the present data with similar cross-national data. More studies are recommended to further support our conclusions. A base-line data about a quiet period, from the security point of view, may improve our understanding of the impact of terror on the general population.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2020.101746>.

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