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Research Article

The Visibility of Kitchen and Cleaning Staff Working in Preschool Education Institutions

Okul Öncesi Eğitim Kurumlarında Çalışan Mutfak ve Temizlik Personelinin Görünürlüğü

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Abstract

Purpose: *This research aims to understand the social visibility of kitchen and cleaning staff working in preschools.* ***Method:*** *The research was conducted using basic qualitative research methods. Maximum variation sampling was used to determine the study group, which consisted of a total of 21 people: 5 kitchen staff, 11 cleaning staff, and 5 administrators. Data were collected from the study group through semi-structured interviews, and the data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The research theoretically examined visibility through socio-cultural (the ways in which culture and society influence visibility), socio-legal (the legal and regulatory factors affecting visibility), and socio-spatial (the physical and spatial aspects of visibility) mechanisms. The themes were named after these mechanisms. Coding and categorization processes were conducted based on visibility.* ***Findings:*** *The research findings demonstrate that kitchen and cleaning staff maintain clear socio-cultural and socio-spatial visibility within preschool settings. However, their socio-legal visibility remains fragmented, showing distinct visibility in certain regulatory categories while remaining entirely invisible in others.* ***Conclusion:*** *The research reveals that while the staff are socio-culturally and socio-spatially visible, they experience partial invisibility within the socio-legal dimension. In light of these findings, it is suggested that future visibility research re-examine socio-spatial mechanisms through a broader, more holistic perspective.*

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Öz

Amaç: *Bu araştırma, anaokullarında çalışan mutfak ve temizlik personelinin sosyal görünürlüğünü anlamayı amaçlamaktadır.* ***Yöntem:*** *Araştırma, temel nitel araştırma yöntemleri kullanılarak yürütülmüştür. Çalışma grubunu belirlemek için maksimum varyasyon örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmış olup, çalışma grubu 5 mutfak personeli, 11 temizlik personeli ve 5 yönetici olmak üzere toplam 21 kişiden oluşmaktadır. Veriler, çalışma grubundan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış ve tematik analiz yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma, görünürlüğü teorik olarak sosyo-kültürel (kültür ve toplumun görünürlüğü etkileme biçimleri), sosyo-yasal (görünürlüğü etkileyen yasal ve düzenleyici faktörler) ve sosyo-mekânsal (görünürlüğün fiziksel ve mekânsal yönleri) mekanizmalar aracılığıyla incelemiştir. Temalar bu mekanizmalara göre adlandırılmıştır. Görünürlüğe dayalı olarak kodlama ve kategorizasyon süreçleri yürütülmüştür.* ***Bulgular:*** *Mutfak ve temizlik personelinin okul öncesi kurumlarda net bir sosyo-kültürel ve sosyo-mekânsal görünürlüğe sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Ancak, sosyo-hukuki görünürlükleri parçalı bir yapı sunmakta; belirli yasal kategorilerde belirgin bir görünürlük sergilerken diğerlerinde tamamen görünmez kalmaktadırlar.* ***Sonuç:*** *Sonuç olarak çalışma, kurumsal personelin iş yerine kültürel ve fiziksel olarak entegre edilmesine rağmen hukuki açıdan marjinalleştiği karmaşık bir manzarayı vurgulamaktadır. Bu dinamiklerden hareketle, gelecek araştırmaların geleneksel sınırların ötesine geçmesi ve sosyo-mekânsal görünürlüğü daha geniş, daha bütüncül bir mercekten analiz etmesi büyük önem taşımaktadır.*

Introduction

Social systems are interconnected, interdependent, and interrelated parts. The preschool education system is also part of social systems and offers unique organizational structures (Bloom, 1991; Hewett & La Paro, 2020). Bloom (1991) places administrators, teachers, children, and families within the preschool education system. However, other staff members besides administrators and teachers, who indirectly influence children's education, are also an important part of preschool education institutions. To be effective and successful, all school staff must actively participate in the education process (Caruso & Fawcett, 2014; Heineke et al., 2012).

In addition to administrative and teaching staff, preschool education institutions also employ personnel with different duties, such as drivers, gardeners, security guards, nurses, cleaning staff, chefs, and assistant chefs (Ministry of National Education [MNE], 2014). These staff members are referred to as educational support staff (Bradshaw et al., 2011), other staff (McNamara & Cassells, 2010; MNE, 2014), or auxiliary staff. These staff strive to create the best environment for other staff members involved in children's education (teachers, assistant teachers, school principals, etc.) to interact with children. Their duties include keeping the school clean, repairing broken and damaged toys, and organizing and assisting with kitchen tasks. Having these staff can allow educators to have more time to deal with children (Bauchmüller et al., 2014).

Various regulations determine which personnel are required in preschool education institutions in Türkiye. The Ministry of National Education's Regulation on Preschool Education and Primary Education Institutions (Ministry of National Education [MNE], 2014) and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies' Regulation on the Establishment and Operation of Private Nurseries, Day Care Centers, and Private Children's Clubs (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2015) govern the operation of preschool education institutions. According to these regulations, institutions have different types of staff, including directors, assistant directors, teachers, school counselors, support staff, specialists, master teachers, and other personnel. Other staff members include cleaning personnel who perform cleaning services and chefs and assistant chefs who perform kitchen duties. It is mandatory for institutions that provide childcare and education to have staff who provide food and cleaning services (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2015). In terms of preschool education policies in Türkiye, the expansion of preschool education is an important policy, and various projects and studies are being carried out (AÇEV, 2005). The expansion of preschool education is related not only to the presence of personnel involved in children's education but also to the presence of personnel such as chef and cleaning staff (Turani & Bloem, 2019).

It has been observed that families have an influential role in children's eating habits and patterns, as well as in the preparation of food and beverages for children. Therefore, ensuring that children receive adequate nutrition at school—whether through meals prepared at home by parents or institutional catering—is an integral part of nutritional practices in preschool education (Andreyeva & Henderson, 2018; Peters et al., 2014). However, research has found that the food prepared by parents at home is of low nutritional quality (Romo-Palafox et al., 2015). In addition, preschool education institutions have goals such as planning food services, preparing nutritious meals, and serving them. Considering that the work of chef in institutions positively affects balanced, adequate, and appropriate nutrition, it should be acknowledged that kitchen staff play an important role in achieving these goals in preschool education institutions (Chandler, 2016; Gerritsen et al., 2017; Sillanpää, 2023).

In preschool education institutions with cafeterias, the task of preparing meals is the responsibility of the chef and assistant chef (MNE, 2014). The presence of a kitchen and chef in preschool education institutions is considered important for children's nutrition, and the kitchen is described as the heart of the school. The presence of a kitchen in the school ensures that food is prepared according to specific procedures, is fresh, nutritionally balanced, varied, hot, and tasty (Sepp et al., 2006). Chefs and chef assistants are responsible for children's eating habits (Sepp et al., 2006), food hygiene and safety (Dah, 2016), menu planning, and serving (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2015; Gerritsen et al., 2017; Seward et al., 2017). The chef 's duties include preparing meals for the staff working in the units and serving them within the specified time, preparing the food and beverages on the menu in sufficient quantities, of high quality, and on time, ensuring the hygiene of the dining hall and kitchen, complying with hygiene rules, preparing the meal list, and implementing occupational health and safety measures

(Harbalıoğlu & Ünal, 2014). In addition to the above-mentioned duties, the tasks of preschool education institutions include instilling and facilitating healthy eating habits in children, providing healthy food, ensuring that the kitchen and dining room meet hygiene standards, and taking samples from meals and storing them in a suitable environment (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2015; Matwiejczyk et al., 2021).

The most basic way to safely store and preserve food and beverages in the kitchen is to keep the kitchen clean. Kitchen cleaning involves ensuring that food preparation and serving areas, dining areas, and kitchen utensils are clean and inspected at regular intervals. This also reduces the risk of illness, makes the kitchen more appealing, and ensures that healthy menus are prepared. Various staff members, such as managers, teachers, and kitchen staff, are involved in menu planning. However, kitchen staff are responsible not only for planning but also for preparing the menus. Menus must be appropriate for children, visually appealing, and accurate in accordance with relevant procedures. Menus prepared for children should comply with food and beverage procedures and policies, consist of fresh fruits and vegetables, and avoid serving processed foods, demonstrating that the preschool education institution has a healthy, nutritious, and balanced menu (Chandler, 2016; Erinosho et al., 2011; Jones & Pound, 2008; National Food Service Management Institute, 2014). It can be said that chefs are aware of the duties and responsibilities mentioned above. In their study on the development of children's eating behaviors, Matwiejczyk et al. (2021) state that the roles and responsibilities of chefs include providing food and ensuring that it is varied and healthy, and that chefs also accept that children are responsible for their own meals. It was found that chefs prepare meals that include a variety of foods, appeal to children, and meet their nutritional needs.

There is growing interest in the quality of service in preschool education. Nutrition is one of the topics that has attracted increased interest. However, various factors are important for institutions to comply with various procedures and guidelines regarding nutrition (Arrabal, 2013; Sambell et al., 2020). Among the sources of this interest are the adequacy of the preschool institution's kitchen facilities (Norwegian Consumer Council and The Norwegian Diet and Nutrition Association, 2018), staff adequacy (Johannessen et al., 2018), staff knowledge of food and nutrition, and the ability to prepare menus suitable for children (Helland et al., 2024). The presence of kitchen staff is not only important for children's nutrition but also ensures that healthy, nutritious meals are served in a comfortable and aesthetically pleasing environment, thereby reinforcing not only the importance of food but also the children's sense of self-worth. This special relationship between the chef and the children during this process contributes to the perception of kitchen staff as an integral part of the institution (Jones & Pound, 2008; Sillanpää, 2023). The presence of kitchen staff is helpful not only for children but also for other staff members, and it is seen as an opportunity. If there is a chef in the institution who knows what to prepare and can cook good meals, the staff consider themselves lucky, and it is stated that the absence of a chef can lead to significant problems (Rush & Downie, 2006; Van Laere et al., 2012). Additionally, having kitchen staff rather than teachers handle meal

services allows teachers to devote more time to classroom activities and relationships. Furthermore, the presence of cleaning staff in the institution affects teachers' ability to devote time to classroom activities and relationships (Bernal et al., 2019).

Cleaning is at the heart of a school and is an important factor in ensuring that education can take place. Cleaning staff are essential for the education process in schools to function in a healthy and effective manner (Burke & Könings, 2016; Gerrard & Barron, 2020). The cleanliness of the school may be even more important for preschool education institutions. Nesti and Goldbaum (2007) state that children in preschool education institutions may have a higher probability of contracting infections, and therefore the rate of disease spread among children may increase. Cleaning staff are responsible for carrying out cleaning services (MNE, 2014). In order to keep the institution clean and tidy, the cleaning staff and the director must work together at the beginning and end of the school year (Daresh & Arrowsmith, 2003). The institution manager prepares a work plan for the cleaning staff, and the staff cleans the kitchen, sinks, and toilets at regular intervals in accordance with this work plan. They also clean and ventilate the group rooms and classrooms. A manager must determine when and how toys and materials should be cleaned. After this determination, the cleaning staff regularly cleans the toys and materials (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2015; Chandler, 2016). In addition, the cleaning staff is responsible for the daily care of children (Caruso & Fawcett, 2014), taking precautions to protect the health of each staff member and the institution (Government of British Columbia, 2003), ensuring that classrooms and other areas are clean, healthy, and safe, controlling the storage of cleaning supplies (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2021), cleaning kitchens, sinks, and toilets (Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2015), and generally overseeing cleaning services in the institution (MNE, 2014).

Invisibility in the workplace

The concept of invisible work describes the social, cultural, and economic devaluation of women's unpaid work. Unpaid work includes housework and other unpaid work (Daniels, 1987). However, over time, the concept has expanded beyond housework and other unpaid work to include those physically out of sight, overlooked or ignored, socially excluded, economically and culturally devalued, and legally unprotected (Hatton, 2017).

Hatton (2017) argues that the concept of invisible work needs to be rethought. In his study, he conceptualized this concept analytically and established the mechanisms of invisibility as socio-cultural, socio-legal, and socio-spatial. In the socio-cultural mechanism, the devaluation and invisibility of labor are caused through gender, race, class, age, talent, and cultural elements. Furthermore, within the socio-cultural mechanism, professional skills are devalued rather than physical labor, the work performed is viewed as culturally unskilled, and the cultural discourse surrounding the work contributes to this devaluation and invisibility. Socio-legal mechanisms devalue employment due to the lack of legal definitions and legal regulations by the state. Within the socio-legal mechanism, the work performed encompasses types of labor considered

non-economic work, as well as illegal and informal labor. The socio-spatial mechanism encompasses situations where work is physically separated from the workplace and economically devalued. Performing the work from home instead of an institutional building, and work done in non-traditional and fragmented workplaces—for instance, cleaners cleaning the office after office workers have gone home—causes the invisibility of labor and results in these workers becoming individuals who are out of sight (Hatton, 2017). This research examines Hatton's (2017) invisible work mechanisms through socio-cultural, socio-legal, and socio-spatial mechanisms.

There are various studies in the literature on the invisibility of cleaning workers, their labor, and the work they perform; for instance, a study conducted with cleaning personnel working in universities revealed that invisibility at work manifests as not being recognized or noticed by other members of the institution, whereas the invisibility of labor is substantiated by cleaning activities being ignored or unappreciated. It has been observed that workers attempt to make sense of this situation through feelings of anger, ambivalence, or resignation, with class division and the absentmindedness/indifference of other institutional employees emerging as the primary underlying causes of this invisibility (Rabelo & Mahalingam, 2019). To alleviate the psychosocial burden brought about by invisibility, employees develop defensive strategies such as casting their eyes downward (Lollar, 2015). Furthermore, the cultural identification of cleaning work with female identity leads to this situation being taken for granted, thereby rendering labor invisible (Simpson & Lewis, 2005). The literature frequently emphasizes that cleaning work is unappreciated, predominantly carried out by women, and that work and labor become invisible due to this gender pattern; in addition, the structure of working hours nurtures the element of invisibility. In particular, the arrangement of working hours according to corporate or institutional dynamics—in a way that prevents encounters with other employees—depriving personnel of social interaction times, and causing them to experience a lack of social recognition serve as critical parameters regarding the invisibility of work and labor (Hviid et al., 2013; Sardadvar, 2026). A similar situation applies to kitchen personnel; Byrd (2016) found that school food service workers are also unseen and unable to make their voices heard. It was determined that kitchen staff are positioned as unskilled and domestic service providers rather than professional service providers; they are held responsible for students' poor food choices, and they face inadequate wages and precarious insurance conditions. Although attempts are made to make this personnel visible through titles such as "cook" or "chef," current practices do not seem to support this visibility. In a study conducted by Sandberg et al. (2025), it was also identified that kitchen workers are not decision-makers in their own work processes, hence their demands are not met, and they perceive themselves as powerless agents. Interestingly, although they do not set the cafeteria rules themselves, they are held directly responsible for the problems that arise in the operations. Moreover, it was found that despite their invisibility, the personnel work under severe risks in terms of occupational health and safety. The conflation of these activities performed by women in the workplace with unpaid domestic labor and the disregard for their institutional

demands are key elements that deepen the invisibility of work and labor (Kosny & MacEachen, 2010; Panikkar et al., 2015). Consequently, in line with the findings in the literature, it can be argued that kitchen and cleaning personnel are subjected to systematic invisibility within cultural, legal, and physical environments. There are very few studies in Türkiye about the work of kitchen and cleaning staff, who indirectly support education through their professions in pre-school education institutions, and the problems they experience regarding their school and work.

Literature review/Theoretical backround

Ateş et al. (2025) investigated the problems school principals experience with support staff. Karatas and Caner (2024) investigated school administrators' perceptions of cleaning staff working as support staff. Caner et al. (2025) investigated the perspectives of support staff working in educational institutions regarding their professions. However, the research conducted by Ateş et al. (2025) and Karatas and Caner (2024) consists of administrators' opinions. Therefore, it does not reflect the views of support staff regarding their own work. In their study, Caner et al. (2025) shared the views of support staff regarding their own professions. However, this study did not include the support staff's statements regarding their professions. Furthermore, these studies included support staff working at different educational levels. While Caruso and Fawcett (2014) stated that auxiliary staff should be considered an indispensable member of educational institutions, it has been noted that these staff are overlooked, invisible, and often not even included in the number of staff per child (Bauchmüller et al., 2014). Van Laere et al. (2012) also noted that research does not include auxiliary staff. They also emphasized the importance of qualitative studies on auxiliary staff in conceptualizing child care and education. This study differs from others in that it focuses only on preschools, considers kitchen and cleaning staff together, comprises the study group of school administrators, kitchen and cleaning staff, and includes participant statements. Furthermore, other studies have focused on the problems experienced and the current situation. However, this study differs from others in focusing on social exclusion and invisibility.

This research will address the following questions:

1. What is the socio-cultural invisibility of kitchen and cleaning staff working in preschools?
2. What is the socio-legal invisibility of preschool kitchen and cleaning staff?
3. What is the socio-spatial invisibility of preschool kitchen and cleaning staff?

Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative research is important in terms of determining how people interpret their experiences, how they interpret their interpretations, and the world they create and construct (Glesne, 2013). In this study, the basic qualitative research method was used.

The main feature of qualitative research is that it focuses on how individuals construct their social reality. Constructing is at the core of basic qualitative research. Therefore, basic qualitative research concerns how people interpret their lives, construct their worlds, and what meaning they attach to their experiences (Merriam, 2014). Basic qualitative research was used because the research aimed to understand the social invisibility situation through the workplace experiences of kitchen and cleaning staff working in pre-school education institutions.

Study Group

In this study, purposeful sampling and maximum diversity sampling, which are types of purposeful sampling, were used. Purposeful sampling is limited to preferred samples and can provide accurate information. Samples with relevant information match the criteria determined by researchers (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Additionally, the fundamental standard for determining participants in purposive sampling is whether the participants are knowledgeable (Patton, 2002). In qualitative research, multiple perspectives are presented to represent the world's complexity. Maximum diversity sampling involves the researcher including individuals or situations that differ in various characteristics in the sample (Creswell, 2012).

The research was conducted in 5 different preschool education institutions. In order to provide diversity in the study group, school administrators are also included in the study group alongside the kitchen and cleaning staff, as they are individuals closely related to the work life of the kitchen and cleaning staff. The participants work in independent preschool education institutions affiliated with the Ministry of National Education. The age range of the participants varies between 35 and 45, and all of the participants are married. All of the kitchen and cleaning staff participating in the study are female, while two of the school administrators are female and three are male. Two of the kitchen staff have been working in the same institution for 10 years, one for 9 years, and the others for 5 years. Among the cleaning staff participating in the study, only one has been working in the same institution for 4 years, while the other cleaning staff have been working in the same institution for 1 year. Three of the school administrators have been working as administrators in the same institution for 7 years, and 2 administrators have been serving in the same institution for 4 years.

An application was submitted to the Afyon Kocatepe University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board for the ethical suitability of the research. It was found to be ethically suitable with application number 2024/349. The ethics committee decided on 16.10.2024, with decision number 2024/349, that the research was not ethically objectionable. A participant consent form was prepared for the ethics committee application. The prepared consent form was presented to the participants prior to the interviews, and each participant signed the consent form.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews with participants were conducted using semi-structured interviews. Smith (1995) states that semi-structured interviews obtain a detailed picture of participants' beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, or explanations about a topic. In addition, semi-structured interviews are flexible and allow for different questions to be asked during the interview based on the context (Morse, 2018). In qualitative research, conducting face-to-face semi-structured interviews leads to gaining more information about the research topic, obtaining strong data, and producing good research results (Muthanna, 2019). Meeting with participants face-to-face before the interviews is important for gaining their trust and ensuring data quality and reliability (Punch, 2005). During the data collection process, face-to-face communication was first established with the managers of preschool education institutions, and the purpose of the study was explained. Then, the kitchen and cleaning staff at the institutions got acquainted. During the data collection process, face-to-face communication was first established with the managers of preschool education institutions, and the purpose of the study was explained. Then, the kitchen and cleaning staff at the institutions got acquainted. Participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary. They were informed that the data obtained from the interviews would be used in academic research and that the interviews would not be shared with third parties. Participants were presented with a consent form containing this information, and they were asked to review it. Participants did not refuse to participate before the interview, and no participant withdrew during the interview process. It was also stated that they could withdraw from the interview at any time during the interview process. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in the school meeting rooms on the determined date. No one other than the participant and researcher participated in the interview process. After the preliminary interview, the date and time of the interview were determined for each participant in a way that would not disrupt the routine and work of the school and its employees. The interviews were conducted face-to-face on the specified date. The interviews with kitchen and cleaning staff lasted 30-35 minutes, while those with the school principal and vice principal lasted 45-50 minutes.

In structured interviews, the interviews are analyzed after completion or after the data collection. The data obtained must be sufficient and not scattered (Morse, 2018). Open-ended questions were asked in the interviews. Before the interview questions were prepared, research and literature on preschool auxiliary staff, kitchen and cleaning staff, and kitchen and cleaning staff working in other work areas were examined. After this review, interview questions were prepared. Since there is no research on kitchen and cleaning staff working in preschool institutions in Türkiye, attention was paid to prepare the research questions in a way that covers working life. Thematic analysis was performed on the data obtained from the interviews. Thematic analysis identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns in the data obtained during the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In thematic analysis, data analysis is flexible and descriptive. It also allows interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The thematic analysis process was conducted deductively based on Hatton's (2017) conceptual framework of

invisibility mechanisms. Interviews were recorded by voice recording. After the interviews, the data were transcribed. After the researcher had read the interviews several times, it was concluded that the data were not scattered and that data saturation had been achieved. The participants' opinions, thoughts, and experiences were analyzed using thematic analysis. After the readings, codes were created. Then, code combinations were made according to the similarities between the created codes. As a result of the code merging, categories were created, and themes were identified based on similar categories. This process was carried out only by the researcher.

Naeem et al. (2024) state that data saturation is a problem in qualitative research, but there are various solutions for it. One of these solutions is the emergence of new patterns and themes. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that repeatedly analysing the data to find new patterns in the data obtained until new patterns and themes do not emerge from the data can provide data saturation. Therefore, the research data were re-read before the final categories and themes were created. Participant statements were coded with different words, and categories and themes were created. However, the same patterns emerged even though the order changed. Therefore, categories and themes were created based on the job application to explore the working life of kitchen and cleaning staff sequentially. In the findings section, codes KP for kitchen staff, CP for cleaning staff, and A for administrator were used to protect the confidentiality of the participants' identities.

Reliability of Research

In scientific research, the evaluation of studies and findings is a basic condition. Such evaluations focus on assessing validity and reliability. Validity and reliability assessments are associated with the positivist paradigm. However, this evaluation is also questioned in qualitative research. Various methods for assessing reliability in qualitative research (Long & Johnson, 2000). One of these methods is peer review. Peer review is the examination of the analysis and results of the research by a colleague (Robson, 1993). In order to ensure reliability in the research, the data were sent to two doctoral-level academicians who had previously conducted qualitative research and whose field of study was preschool education. Before the data were sent, information was given about invisible work, the purpose of the research, the method, and the study group. First, the interview document and the codes, categories, and themes created afterwards were sent to the academics. After the academician examined the data, they stated that the themes and categories were appropriate and reflected the research.

Results/Findings

Data obtained from interviews with kitchen and cleaning staff and managers formed the basis for the findings. Hatton's (2017) categories of invisible work—socio-cultural, socio-legal, and socio-spatial—were identified as the main themes. Because these themes formed the research questions, they were considered in the coding of the interviews. The codes were then combined to form categories. This section presents the findings with

examples from the data obtained within the framework of the themes and categories under the relevant theme.

Findings Related to the First Problem Statement of the Research

Socio-cultural

As a result of interviews with kitchen and cleaning staff and managers, the categories of family environment, skills, and cultural discourse were determined under the socio-cultural theme. The categories and participant statements are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-Cultural Theme Categories and Participant Statements

Theme	Category	Participant Statements
Socio-cultural	Like family	KP1-*I feel happy when I come to school. Now we see this place as our home.* KP5- *This place has become like our home. We do the same things we do at home.* *KP2- We truly are a family here. We have a beautiful family bond here, including the administrators, teachers, and staff.* *CP10-We are all united here. Everyone sees us this way.* *CP6- We are all like a family.* *A4- There is a family atmosphere at our school. Everyone is friendly with each other.* *A2- Our relationships are not limited to the institution. We also take care of staff when they have illness or problems.*
	Skill	KP2- *We plan the menu monthly with the principal.* KP1- *Of course, when I put forward an idea, we can add it to the list.* KP4- *We generally decide on the menu jointly with the management.* CP9- *They trust us.* CP2- *They like what we do. That's why they don't interfere.* CP1- *We try to do our work right. No one complains.* A1- *The assistant principal makes decisions together with the chef, but ultimately, the three of us make the decisions together. We also get our teachers' opinions. A joint decision is made with their opinions.* A4- *When they're planning the menu... the chefs are already fifty percent of the work. When the menu is being determined, the chefs say, "Let's add this next to this, this would be more appropriate, let's add dessert to this."*
	Cultural discourse	*KP3-I've never experienced anything like condescension or belittling.* *CP9- The teachers are very caring. They don't treat me like a cleaner.* *CP4- They're often belittled as "cleaners." We get along well.* *CP7- I communicate very well with the children. Now, I'm at the door every morning. They smile when I walk in. They say "Good morning, auntie."* *CP3- Neither the administrators nor the teachers have ever belittled me as a cleaner.* *A3- Both I and the others are government employees. Everyone is an employee. Because everyone at the school approaches me this way, there's no belittling the work done. Everyone does their job.* *A1- Everyone has a job and does their job. For example, cleanliness is very important. The children's health, the school being clean, parents seeing the cleanliness... how can I belittle someone who does these things?*

KP (kitchen personnel), CP (cleaning staff), A (administrator)

Examining the participant statements in Table 1 suggests that kitchen and cleaning staff are not invisible or excluded within the socio-cultural context, but somewhat visible and accepted. First, the kitchen and cleaning staff view the school environment as a family

environment, and administrators support this family environment. Another point is the trust in the kitchen and cleaning staff's abilities. Trust in the skills of the kitchen staff is demonstrated through behaviors such as collaborating with them in menu preparation, making decisions together, listening to their ideas, and implementing them. For cleaning staff, satisfaction with the work done and the lack of intervention can show trust in their abilities. When examining the cultural discourse within the institution, the kitchen and cleaning staff are perceived as part of the school. Children interacting with the staff, the absence of exclusionary behavior from administrators and teachers, and the appreciation of the kitchen and cleaning staff's work indicate that they are visible, not excluded.

Findings Related to the Second Problem Statement of the Research

Socio-legal

The research, under the socio-legal theme related to kitchen and cleaning staff, identified categories such as legal conditions, special conditions, duties and responsibilities, in-service training, union, and work assurance. Table 2 presents the themes, categories, and participant statements.

Table 2. Socio-legal Theme Categories and Participant Statements

Theme	Category	Participant Statements
Socio-legal	Legal conditions	*KP2- We register with the company. Then we go to school.* *KP5- We have to be registered employees of the company. We can't work without a company.* *CP3- I applied to the Social Security Institution (SGK), and they called from the Directorate of National Education.* *CP6- I also applied to İŞKUR (Turkish Employment Agency).* *CP9- I went to İŞKUR. They gave me the application form. I filled it out accordingly, and then they called from the Directorate of National Education.* *A2- Now, as I said, we have requirements. What do we require? Three years of experience, a chef certificate, and a hygiene certificate.* *A3- We procure services not only for national education, but also in accordance with the procedures for general service procurement.* *A1- It's included in the regulations and budget line from our own school. We procure services through the company.* *A5- There's a project called İUP (Workforce Adjustment Program). Through a protocol established by İŞKUR and the Ministry of National Education, we recruit personnel in accordance with the procedures for İUP and TYP (Working for the Benefit of the Society Project).*
	Duties and responsibilities	*KP4- The chef's duties are already defined. Prepare meals, clean the kitchen...* KP5- *I'm the assistant chef. We distribute the food among ourselves based on what needs to be done throughout the day. You add the water, prepare the ingredients, and I'll chop it.* CP8- *Everyone does their own job. There are no problems. Wherever there are openings, everyone works there.* CP7- *The administration makes its own decision. The administration acts according to who it wants to assign and where it wants.* A3- *I distribute tasks. I always communicate their duties when they first start work. We formally communicate their job descriptions when they start work.*

	A5- *Laws and regulations don't specify in detail how cleaning should be done. Therefore, we have determined the limits and workloads of all our employees.*
In-service training	*KP4- We received mandatory training. Work safety, first aid... But we did not receive any other training for our profession.* *KP1- There is no management guidance for us to receive training related to our profession. We only receive the training we are told to receive.* *KP5- There is no training for professional development. There is only compulsory training.* *CP10- We only attend hygiene courses. Because we're in contact with children, there are certain courses that need to be taken, so we take them.* CP7- *There is mandatory training as outlined by the management. We are receiving that training.* CP6- *We received no training other than the mandatory training. No such proposal was received from the administration.* *A5- Hygiene training is already mandatory by law. We send our staff to training and ensure they receive it. Occupational safety training is absolutely essential; it's mandatory.* *A1- Unfortunately, because they're not on the permanent staff, their names aren't included in vocational training programs. We have to cover the costs from the budget. However, the budget only covers the school's needs.* *A4- Because they aren't permanent staff, they don't receive professional development training. Therefore, we have to fund training ourselves. Because our budget isn't sufficient, we don't provide training.*
Union	*KP1- Since we work through the company, we cannot become the union members.* *KP4- They told us we wouldn't join the union. We never asked why. If we didn't do what they said, we probably wouldn't work again.* *CP3- We came through İŞKUR. We don't know anything about the union.* *CP1- We applied to İŞKUR and then came here to work. I hven't heard anything about the union.* *A3- Permanent personnel, of course, have the union rights, but personnel employed through the company do not have such a situation.* *A1- Permanent employees have the union rights under their own laws and regulations. However, others do not.*
Work assurance	*KP2- We're working through the company. Since we are a subcontractor, even the slightest mistake may result in your dismissal.* *KP5- Our contract with the company must be renewed every year. Otherwise, we cannot work.* *KP4- Of course, we're not safe because we're subcontractors. The law doesn't protect us. If we were permanent employees, we'd be safe.* *CP2- At the end of every year, we leave our jobs and reapply to İŞKUR. Apparently, these are the rules. Of course, when this is always the case, there's no guarantee.* *CP8- At the end of each year, we quit our jobs and reapply to İŞKUR. Apparently, those are the rules. Of course, as things have always been, there's no guarantee we'll ever be employed again.* *CP7- We'll work until the contract expires. I don't know what happens after that.* *A5- When employees are permanent, they know they won't be fired and will stay on next year. They have work assurance. Of course, when they're not permanent, they do not feel a sense of work assurance.* *A1- Employees who come from İŞKUR are already on a fixed-term basis. They leave when that period ends. If they perform their duties well, they stay on throughout their term.* *A2- There's no guarantee for personnel coming from companies or İŞKUR. But there's one thing: If they were permanent employees, they'd be safe.*

When Table 2 is examined, it can be said that kitchen and cleaning staff are generally invisible in the socio-legal mechanism. It can be seen from the participant statements that the job application process was carried out within the framework of the law and regulations. Managers distribute tasks during the task distribution process. However, it is stated that there is no legally detailed job description for kitchen and cleaning staff. The absence of detailed legal job descriptions for kitchen and cleaning staff may indicate legal invisibility. In-service training covers the invisibility and socio-legal visibility of the staff. The fact that they are compulsorily trained in occupational health and hygiene during their work period indicates that they are visible. However, the lack of procedures for them to receive professional training indicates they are not visible. It is stated that the main reason for this is that the cleaning and sanitation staff are not permanent staff, and the school budget is insufficient. The fact that kitchen and cleaning workers cannot register with a union within the socio-legal mechanism shows that they are invisible regarding labor rights. As in other cases, the main reason for this is cited as not being permanent. The fact that kitchen and cleaning staff are temporary subcontracted, not permanent staff, is the reason for their legal invisibility regarding union rights, in-service training, and work assurance.

Findings Regarding the Third Problem Situation of the Research

Socio-spatial

The private space category was found under the socio-spatial theme. Table 3 shows the theme and category along with participant statements.

Table 3. Socio-Spatial Theme Categories and Participant Statements

Theme	Category	Participant Statements
Socio-spatial	Private space	*KP2- I come to the kitchen in the morning and start preparations immediately.* *KP4- We spend our days in the kitchen.* *KP1- Whenever there is spare time, we sit in the kitchen and relax for a while.* *CP8- We chat outside about how the day went, what happened, and about ourselves.* *CP5-Since I'm cleaning the kitchen, ı don't leave there much.* *CP10- We don't have a private place of our own. We go to the kitchen to rest.* *CP7- We don't have a room that's just for us. Whenever there's spare time, we go to the kitchen or something.* *A2- There's no separate place for the cleaning staff. The chefs are already in the kitchen.* *A4- There's a teachers' room. Staff can use it when they're free, but they don't have private rooms.* *A1- The chef and his assistant spend their days in the kitchen. They're there constantly. Unfortunately, we don't have the same physical resources for cleaning staff.*

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that there is an area where kitchen workers can do their work and rest, and this area is naturally the kitchen. However, it is seen that there is such permanence for the cleaning staff and that the cleaning staff's kitchen is used. The fact that kitchen and cleaning staff come and work at the school shows that it is socio-

spatially visible. However, as seen in the participants' statements, while kitchen staff have a space to work and rest during the day, cleaning staff do not have such opportunities. This situation is detailed in the discussion section.

Conclusion and Recommendations

When the visibility of kitchen and cleaning staff working in preschool educational institutions was examined as socio-cultural, socio-legal and socio-spatial mechanisms, different results were reached in terms of each mechanism.

When the results of the socio-cultural mechanism were examined, it was determined that the kitchen and cleaning staff were visible in the workplace and were not excluded. This is demonstrated by the staff's description of the institution as a family environment or as being like a family. " The phrase “we are like a family” is used to demonstrate positive relationships within the organization. This employee description is also supported by managers. Van Leeuwen (1996) states that the metaphor of “like a family” is a relational identification of school staff towards belonging to each other. Caruso and Fawcett (2014) view the school as a family and state that support staff are also part of the school, which is seen as a family. Research shows administrators are important in creating a favorable school climate and culture (Loukas et al., 2006; Zinsser et al., 2016). This information supports the research findings. The fact that administrators define institutions as families may be the reason for the visibility of kitchen and cleaning staff.

Another way kitchen and cleaning staff gain visibility in preschools is through their skills. Their ability to play a significant role in menu creation and implement their ideas demonstrates their visibility. Research has found that kitchen staff (chef and assistant chef) are involved in menu planning (Birch & Doub, 2014; Sepp, Abrahamsson, & Fjellström, 2006) and that managers, teachers, and kitchen staff plan together (Chandler, 2016; Cole, Vidgen, & Cleland, 2017; Lyn et al., 2014). This supports the qualitative results of the research. The fact that cleaning staff do not complain about the work done and are trusted in their cleaning work shows that they are competent in their skills. The cultural discourse is another point that shows that the kitchen and cleaning staff are visible. It is seen that the cultural discourse towards kitchen and cleaning staff is not such as cleaner or chef, but rather like any other staff in the institution. This shows that kitchen and cleaning staff are visible and not excluded. Relationships in the workplace provide opportunities for both valuation and devaluation to occur among employees. Therefore, the employee in the workplace determines the value given to her by measuring how others treat her (Dutton et al., 2016). Employees who see and feel their values through relationships attribute more meaning to their work and feel valued (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). However, a study conducted with cleaning staff working at a university determined that cleaning staff felt invisible and unrecognized (Rabelo & Mahalingam, 2019). The research conducted by Rabelo and Mahalingam (2019) does not support the result of this research. It is possible that the cultural discourse surrounding kitchen and cleaning staff in preschools is not exclusionary, and that this decision was made by staff considering the behavior of other staff. As mentioned above, the fact that administrators

described the school as a family environment, while kitchen and cleaning staff viewed the school as a family environment, may have made the cultural discourse visible to the staff.

It has been determined that the initiation process of kitchen and cleaning staff as a socio-legal mechanism is in accordance with the law, regulation, and procedure, and that the process progresses in accordance with the law, regulation, and procedure. Therefore, it was concluded that the kitchen and cleaning staff were legally visible during the recruitment process—participants in the study work in institutions affiliated with the Ministry of National Education. In the regulation of the Ministry of National Education to which the institutions are affiliated, there is an article that allows the recruitment of auxiliary personnel through purchasing, with the salaries of some auxiliary personnel being covered by the general budget and non-budgetary resources, and the procedures regarding the duties of these personnel being determined by contract. Furthermore, it appears that a protocol has been signed between the Ministry of National Education and İŞKUR, allowing workers to be employed in educational institutions (MNE, 2014; İŞKUR, 2010). Polat (2013) notes that purchasing a cleaning service is another way to employ cleaning staff, which is frequently offered in preschools. Another study found that school administrators were effective in employing auxiliary staff through school budgets (Karataş & Caner, 2024). Furthermore, nonprofit preschools can employ staff through government-developed and government-supported job training programs, including chefs and cleaners (Caruso & Fawcett, 2014). Furthermore, it appears that a protocol has been signed between the Ministry of National Education and İŞKUR, allowing workers to be employed in educational institutions (İŞKUR, 2010). It can be argued that the existence and implementation of specific procedures in the recruitment process for kitchen and cleaning staff provide socio-legal visibility.

Another legal process involves duties and responsibilities. It was determined that there are regulations and procedures regarding the duties and responsibilities of kitchen and cleaning staff, but the duties and responsibilities outlined here are not comprehensive. The institutions surveyed are affiliated with the Ministry of National Education, and the Ministry of National Education (2014) includes a regulation stating that "the duties and responsibilities of personnel working in the institution shall be determined within the framework of relevant legislation and communicated to the personnel." It has been determined that the duties and responsibilities of the managers participating in the research were determined and shared with the staff. However, it can be stated that managers determine duties and responsibilities. The reason for this is that the duties and responsibilities are not specified in detail in the regulation. Therefore, it shows that there is no complete visibility in terms of duties and responsibilities in the socio-legal mechanism. It is stated that institution managers should establish a system for kitchen and cleaning work and that this system should ensure the distribution of tasks in a way that ensures the healthy and productive work of the assistant staff (Daresh & Arrowsmith, 2003; Reiman & Väyrynen, 2018). Duties and responsibilities that are not clearly defined by law, regulation, and procedure may cause the manager to add different duties and responsibilities and to perform tasks other than those duties and

responsibilities. This situation poses a risk of hindering socio-legal visibility. However, the Ministry of National Education (2014) states that managers should communicate their duties and responsibilities to staff. Managers participating in the study stated that their duties and responsibilities are officially communicated to staff. This may be a legal way to ensure that visibility is concealed, but there still seems to be no clear visibility.

Regarding socio-legal visibility, it has been determined that there is no complete visibility of in-service training for kitchen cleaning staff. The fact that personnel are required to receive compulsory training such as occupational health and safety, hygiene training, and first aid training, which are visible from a socio-legal perspective, is an indication of their visibility. In Türkiye, a law passed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Services mandates occupational health and safety training for workplace personnel (Ministry of Labor and Social Services, 2013). However, kitchen and cleaning staff do not receive in-service training for their professional development. This is because these personnel are not permanent staff, and the Ministry of National Education only provides in-service training to permanent staff. In addition, administrators state that the school budget should be used to provide in-service training for kitchen and cleaning staff, and it is stated that administrators do not include in-service training in the budget and that the budget is only sufficient to cover expenses. In this case, kitchen and cleaning staff are not fully visible within the scope of in-service training. It has been stated that kitchen and cleaning staff should receive training regarding challenging behaviors they may encounter with children (Fox & Hemmeter, 2009). Fox and Hemmeter's (2009) statement indicates that training should be mandatory and address the problems they may encounter in preschools. It is more appropriate for them to receive in-service training to address the problems they may encounter in their current workplace and to ensure they perform their profession well. This could also increase socio-legal visibility. Studies have shown that chefs have a certificate in food and hygiene. Very few chefs attend menu planning and preparation training, but very few chefs receive training in nutrition and basic food safety (Enke et al., 2007; Gerritsen et al., 2017; Pollard et al., 1999). Research has shown that chefs need different training to improve themselves, and that they want to receive face-to-face training instead of online training, and that the training they receive contributes to skills such as menu preparation, portion size, presentation and age-appropriate portion preparation (London Early Years Foundation Chef Academy, 2023; Matwiejczyk et al., 2021; National Education Leader, 2020). Enke et al. (2007) determined that managerial training is often withheld due to perceived budget inefficiencies and time constraints. However, in an institution, the leader must encourage and motivate all staff to develop themselves and ensure a professional work environment (Barblett & Kirk, 2018). When the literature and research results are examined, it is seen that the administrators do not include in the school budget for in-service training of kitchen and cleaning staff. They cannot receive professional training for their own development because they are not permanent staff; thus, they are not socio-legally visible.

The exclusion of kitchen and cleaning staff from socio-legal protection mechanisms is also demonstrated by their institutional vulnerability regarding labor rights,

specifically highlighted by the absence of union representation. The employment of kitchen and cleaning staff through companies and projects, and the fact that this type of employment is not legally permitted for unionization, causes the staff to be legally excluded and invisible. This has led to another research finding that workers lack work assurance. It has been concluded that kitchen and cleaning staff are not legally protected from losing their jobs or being dismissed, feel insecure, and are therefore invisible. The main reason for this is attributed to the lack of permanent staff in in-service training. Studies have found that cleaning workers working in schools are deprived of fundamental rights such as sick leave and annual leave (Gerrard & Barron, 2020). Kaya (2015), in his study of subcontracted workers, found that workers were denied their rights, were reluctant to join a union out of fear of losing their jobs, and were afraid of being fired. Taşkıran (2011) also noted that the subcontracting system deprived workers of their rights and concluded that workers were unable to unionize out of fear of being fired, leading to problems in this regard. In the research conducted by Polat and Esen (2022), it is seen that school administrators find the budget allocated by the Ministry of National Education to schools insufficient and that the budget is insufficient to continue education. In Türkiye, a law was enacted in 2018 to allow subcontracted workers in the public sector to become permanent staff (Official Gazette, 2018). This law allows subcontracted workers in the public sector to continue their employment as permanent staff if they meet certain conditions. However, the official letter published by the Ministry of National Education's General Directorate of Support Services (2018) regarding the implementation principles for subcontracted workers to become permanent staff states that personnel employed through projects conducted with the parent-teacher association and İŞKUR (Turkish Employment Agency) are not included in this scope. As mentioned above, kitchen and cleaning staff working in preschool education institutions are employed using the budget of the parent-teacher association or through projects conducted with İŞKUR. It can be said that preschool employees are victims of this.

Furthermore, research has shown that kitchen and cleaning staff working in preschool education institutions were not visible during the legislative amendment process. The invisibility of kitchen and cleaning staff during this process negatively impacts their socio-legal visibility in the future. The results of the research support the conclusion of the research. The long-standing problem of contract workers joining a union and exercising their union rights persists. The lack of legal regulations reduces the legal visibility of these workers. The inadequacy of legal rights for contract workers employed by a company may indicate that the rights of the company and the employer are being protected, rather than the rights of the employees.

From a socio-spatial theoretical perspective, it has been established that kitchen and cleaning staff possess a distinct visibility. This is because they physically work at the school and work the same hours as other staff. One of the key elements of the socio-spatial mechanism is that all staff within the institution work in the same space and on the same hours. This demonstrates the visibility of the kitchen and cleaning staff. Kitchen staff are seen performing all their work and resting in the kitchen. This means that kitchen staff

have their own space within the facility. However, this is not the case for cleaning staff. Regarding cleaning staff, cleaners and chefs working in kindergartens have shared break rooms and coffee breaks to create a sense of community (Kekkonen & Reiman, 2019). When the research results are examined, having separate rooms for rest, breaks, etc. ensures the visibility of the cleaning staff, while not having them leads to a lack of visibility.

In this case, Hatton's (2017) category of socio-spatial mechanism needs to be reconsidered. Hatton (2017) categorizes socio-spatial mechanisms as physical presence in the workplace. However, basing the concept of space on whether the employee is present or not, or whether they are visible to others within the space, suggests that the concept of space is used more generally. The workplace, and in this case, the school, are spaces. However, it is important to remember that spaces are also within a space. The space covered in this study is a preschool. From this perspective, a school is a space, and within the school are the administrator's office, assistant administrator's office, staff room, kitchen, and classrooms. These include the administrator's room, where the administrator and assistant administrator can work and rest, the teachers' room, where teachers can rest before and after instruction, the kitchen, where the chef and assistant chef can work and rest, and the classroom where children are educated. The cleaning staff's workspace includes classrooms, kitchens, administrator and assistant administrator offices, staff rooms, sinks and toilets, and the entire school grounds. These are all areas that must be cleaned. Where do cleaning staff have their own space where they can relax during their breaks? Since there is no suitable space for cleaning staff, it may be more accurate to consider it as invisible from a socio-spatial perspective. Because a good work environment enables employees to be productive, focus on their duties and responsibilities, and even the level at which social needs are met can lead to retention or quitting (Haynes, 2008; Sehgal, 2012). The inability of employees to personalize their work environments also leads to emotional burnout (Elsbach, 2003). One study found that in organizations with flexible desks, employees experienced problems in being in the same environment with colleagues and teammates, which hindered collaboration and communication. The same study observed that as employees working at fixed desks decreased their satisfaction with their break areas, their productivity also decreased (Kim et al., 2016). However, different studies also showed that working in open and flexible areas fostered positive relationships among employees (Chadburn et al., 2017; Van der Voordt, 2004; Schriefer, 2005). The research found that kitchen staff have their own dedicated workspace, the kitchen, and the dining hall. Kitchen staff prepare and serve the menu here, and spend their free time there. However, cleaning staff do not have their own dedicated space. The preschools surveyed cannot be considered to have fully open and flexible spaces. This is because the principal and vice principals have their own offices, the teachers' room, where teachers meet with their classes and colleagues, and the kitchen, where kitchen staff spends the entire day, are all within the school.

It's natural for each workspace to have its own dedicated spaces. Preschools also have their own spatial differences. Therefore, socio-spatial visibility should be evaluated

beyond simply being present at the workplace. The physical environment of a workplace, its planning and design, the physical space, and the distribution of furniture communicate how the workplace values its employees (Pitt & Bennett, 2008). From this perspective, according to Hatton (2017), kitchen and cleaning staff are visible within the socio-spatial mechanism category. However, cleaning staff do not have specific work and break areas. Rather than treating the socio-spatial mechanism as a general area, considering other areas can provide a better understanding of socio-spatial and social visibility.

Kitchen and cleaning staff working in preschools are socio-culturally visible. However, their visibility can be increased and improved. Kitchen staff interact with administrators, teachers, children, and cleaning staff throughout the day. However, they appear to lack relationships with families, who are integral to the education process. Visibility can be achieved by creating opportunities for kitchen staff to share their skills and knowledge with families. A similar process can be followed for cleaning staff. However, staff must possess these skills to share knowledge and skills. In-service training becomes crucial for this. This highlights the importance of socio-legal visibility. The study identified socio-legal issues regarding kitchen and cleaning staff. Because they are not permanent staff and the school budget does not include in-service training, staff will face difficulties in developing their professional skills. From a socio-legal perspective, they lack visibility in matters such as union rights and work assurance. Legal regulations are clearly necessary to address this. Kitchen and cleaning staff can be informed about legal regulations and provided with opportunities to meet with staff working in different organizations. This is considered important for managers.

Another point is socio-spatial visibility. It is believed that socio-spatial visibility should be defined differently. Hatton (2017) addressed the concept of space in a very general way. Research could be conducted on whether employees having their own spaces within the organization affects visibility.

Ethical Approval

An application was submitted to the Afyon Kocatepe University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board for the ethical suitability of the research, and it was found to be ethically suitable with application number 2024/349.

Author Contributions

Mehmet Oğuz Göle: Conceptualization, Theoretical Background, Methodology, Data Analysis, Data Visualization, Writing, Review and Editing, Funding Acquisition

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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