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Web Series Consumption Among Youth: Physical and Mental Health Risks

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Abstract

The rapid growth of digital platforms has transformed entertainment consumption, particularly among youth. This study examines the physical, psychological, and sociological effects associated with web series consumption among young adults, focusing on viewing patterns and binge-watching behaviour. Primary data were collected through an online survey of 150 respondents. Findings suggest that frequent web series consumption is associated with disrupted sleep patterns, sedentary behaviour, and elevated risk indicators for physical and mental health concerns, including insomnia, anxiety, and eye strain. The study also highlights perceived cultural effects, such as normalisation of explicit content, and its possible association with viewer attitudes. These findings point to the importance of balanced media consumption and media literacy interventions to mitigate risks linked to excessive web series viewing. As a cross-sectional survey, this study identifies associations rather than causal effects.

Keywords: *Web series, mental health, physical health, health risk, youth, binge-watching*

1. Introduction

Creative and engaging web series content has drawn audiences away from traditional television toward digital platforms (Henderson, 2018). More specifically, factors such as viewer fatigue with television, less-censored content, and other catalysts continue to boost web series viewership. (Benziker & B, 2021, pp. 259-275) Web series represent a distinct production format that offers high-quality, engaging content. (Montoya-Bermúdez & Soto-Sanfiel, 2023, pp. 1-17) They have emerged as the preferred content for Generation M (millennials), assembling new forms of text across digital media platforms. (OTT Content Consumption Patterns Differ Between Millennials and Gen Z, 2023) At the same time, as communication technology shifts from analogue to digital, India has rapidly moved from 2G/3G to 4G and is now moving toward 5G. Audiences are also increasingly shifting from consumers to prosumers. In recent years, the number of mobile and smart television users has risen alongside internet connectivity; this convergence has accelerated digitalisation and encouraged audiences toward technology-friendly consumption environments. Audiences are increasingly engaged in the construction of multi-dimensional communication texts, supporting this new feature of digitalisation. The growing reach of mobile phones and internet accessibility, in both urban and rural areas, has expanded online streaming and reduced the constraints of time and space. The convergence of over-the-top (OTT) platforms and internet data has reshaped how audiences meet their entertainment needs. Viewing hab-

its for internet and OTT content are changing rapidly (Patnaik & Singh, 2021). Web series are now among the most consumed forms of digital content and have popularised the notion of “anywhere- anytime” for the entertainment industry. The relatively low cost of web series consumption is also frequently cited as a contributing factor. (Dhiman & Malik, 2022) Digital platforms typically offer AVOD (ad-supported video on Demand) and SVOD (Subscription video on Demand). Numerous subscription plans for digital content, including web series, are comparatively affordable relative to cinema tickets, making web series consumption more accessible. According to FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry) 2020, digital media accounted for 31% of new viewers, and subscription frequency increased by 106% in 2019. Advertising rates also rose by 24% over the same period.

The frequency of web series viewing has grown steadily over time, particularly among youth (Chandra et al., 2023), many of whom report watching for more than an hour at a stretch. One study found that approximately 95% of youth (ages between 18-25) in metro cities such as Mumbai and Delhi reported watching web series; 81% of viewers accessed content through OTT platforms, and 42% reported watching daily. Consequently, binge-watching behaviour has become widespread among viewers. (Fernandes & Pinto, 2020, pp. 17-24) According to the Deloitte Report 2015, binge-watching also called marathon viewing, is a communal phenomenon at the moment. In 2013, Oxford added the term “binge-watching” to the English dictionary. Some scholars have characterised web series content as reflecting Westernisation. Web series content often engages with diverse and sometimes harsh social realities. (Joshi, 2026, pp. 22-30) Because youth make up a large share of the viewership, concerns have been raised about possible links between content exposure and behaviour. (Benziker & B., 2021) Depictions of drug and alcohol use, sexual content, coarse language, and violence are recurring narrative elements, and web series frequently present material that would not be permitted on television or in theatrical release. (Kumar, 2025, pp. 24-30) A public interest litigation was filed in the Bombay High Court concerning the need for a pre-screening body to regulate explicit content in web series before online release. This raises an open question: to what extent does depicting such content for the sake of realism affect the audience? Several studies have examined this question, exploring potential effects of web series exposure on viewers, including possible associations with disrupted

sleep patterns and shifts in social conduct. (Chandra et al., 2023)

Today’s youth are heavily reliant on electronic devices and immersed in digital environments; the number of viewers, subscribers, and OTT platforms has grown rapidly as a result. Once a web series is released or spreads through word of mouth, viewers often do not stop at a single episode and may watch an entire season in one sitting. (Sil et al., 2025, pp. 215-220) Some studies report that viewers compromise on household responsibilities and reduce physical activity as a result. This may lead to reduced engagement in outdoor activity, study, or work, particularly during late-night and early-morning hours. “Netflixification” has been used to describe how such media encourages regular or binge-watching consumption. This pattern has also been described as contributing to a new form of “digital cultural production”. While viewers are often aware of this pattern, some studies suggest they may nonetheless prioritise virtual engagement over other activities. Some studies associate heavy web series consumption among early adolescents and youth with reduced participation in everyday social life and outdoor activity, which in turn has been linked to health concerns such as obesity. Other research points to possible associations between heavy digital media use and emotional and behavioural changes, as well as to the potential impact of exposure to violent or criminal content on viewers. (Shaikh & D’Silva, 2025)

Excessive or unregulated web series consumption has been associated with health risks affecting both mind and body (Rashmi & Jain, 2023). The literature suggests possible physical, social, and psychological effects among young adults. Extended, sedentary viewing of web series has been linked in prior research to physical health complaints such as headaches, back pain, eye strain, and anxiety. Prolonged, unstructured screen exposure has similarly been associated with mental health concerns. Beyond visual strain from continuous audio-visual exposure, repeated exposure to loud noise has been linked to hearing difficulties. Sleep disruption is another frequently reported association with binge-watching, and some studies report higher levels of depression and anxiety symptoms among frequent binge-watchers. (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020)

Moderate, well-regulated web series consumption does not appear to carry the same risks. Deliberately limiting episode counts and screen time is associated with greater viewer satisfaction and fewer reported problems. Passive, non-strenuous viewing habits may serve as a pro-

protective factor. (Chandra et al., 2023) Overall, balanced consumption within a healthy daily routine, supported by media literacy for adolescents and young adults, may help safeguard well-being. This study aims to examine the societal impact of web series consumption and to explore its associations with physical and mental health risk indicators among youth.

2. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

This study is grounded in Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory, which holds that audiences actively select media to satisfy specific needs, such as entertainment, escapism, social interaction, and information-seeking (Watson, 2006). U&G provides a useful lens for web series consumption because viewers actively choose what, when, and how much to watch, often citing convenience and anytime-anywhere access as key gratifications. This study extends U&G by examining unintended physical and psychological correlates that may emerge when gratification-seeking behaviour intensifies into binge-watching, linking motivated media selection to self-reported health and behavioural outcomes.

Based on this framework and the objectives outlined above, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Frequency of web series consumption is associated with self-reported sleep-pattern disturbance.

H2: Frequency of web series consumption is associated with perceptions of its negative societal impact (e.g., coarse language, crime and violence).

H3: Frequency of web series consumption is associated with self-reported disruption of physical and social activity.

H4: Frequency of web series consumption is not significantly associated with perceived crime- and violence-related societal impact.

3. Materials and Methods

This study uses a primary, survey-based methodology to explore the social, physical, and health-related effects associated with web series consumption. Data were collected from youth in Bhopal and Indore, two of India's Smart Cities, selected for their comparatively high digital literacy and representative cross-section of regular web series viewers. Both cities fall under the Government of India's Smart Cities Mission, a centrally sponsored scheme. As young adults are among the highest-volume

consumers of web series, they were selected as the target population for this study. All respondents provided informed consent, and participation was anonymous and voluntary.

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. We obtained 150 complete, usable responses over one month in October 2020. The researchers developed the questionnaire for this study; a small pilot review checked item clarity, but the instrument's psychometric properties (e.g., internal consistency reliability) were not formally tested, which is acknowledged as a limitation in Section 5. Two subject-matter experts reviewed the instrument for face validity before distribution.

4. Results and Discussion

This section reports key findings on the body and mind risk factors associated with web series consumption among youth. The questionnaire comprised two sections: Section A collected demographic details, and Section B used Likert-scale items to measure perceived societal, physical, and health-related effects of web series consumption. Completing the questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes.

4.1 Frequency of Web Series Viewing

Variation in web series viewing patterns reflects the heterogeneous nature of the audience. This variation aligns with digital platforms' defining feature of "anytime-anywhere" access. Viewers have their interpretations towards the potential adaptation of digital media.

Figure 1 shows the reported frequency of web series viewing among youth. 40% of respondents reported watching web series "usually," while approximately 22% reported watching "sometimes." Fewer respondents reported watching "always" than "usually," which may indicate that, at the time of data collection, web series were still competing with television for viewers' attention rather than having fully displaced it.

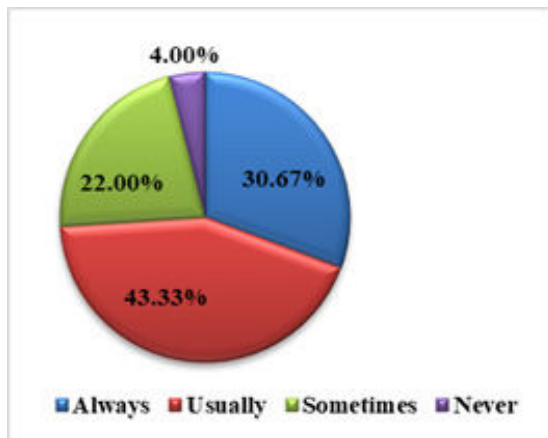


Fig.1. Watching frequency

4.2 Time of Web Series Viewing

As viewing habits shift from television to web series, the scheduling and mode of content consumption are changing considerably. The fixed-schedule model of television viewing is giving way to the “anytime-anywhere” accessibility of web platforms. Figure 2 shows that most viewers prefer watching web series late at night, with about one-fourth favouring the early-night period; day and evening viewing were less common. Because such viewing patterns can encroach on sleep and daily routines, they are noted here as a factor that may be associated with disrupted sleep and daily-life balance.

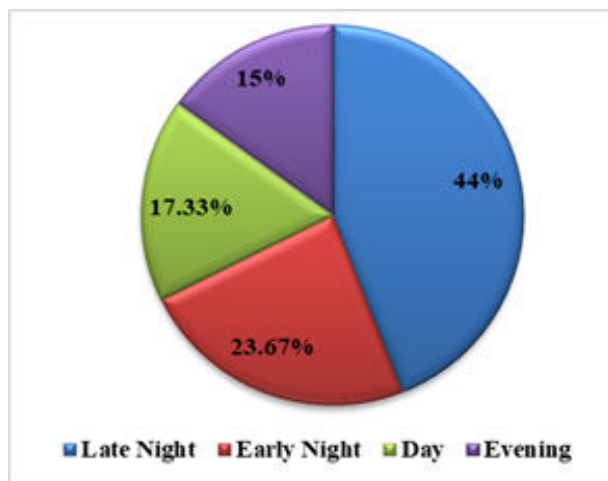


Fig.2. Time of watching

4.3 Perceived Societal Impact of Web Series

Web series and related digital content are characterised by personalisation and convenience, allowing viewers to access uncensored content with minimal filtering.

Youth viewers are exposed to content involving drug and alcohol use, sexual content, coarse language, and violence. As shown in Figure 3, more than half of respon-

dents indicated that web series content affects society in some way: 34.33% agreed, and 21.66% strongly agreed. This perceived societal impact may be associated with uncensored or Westernised content, though this study cannot establish a causal link.

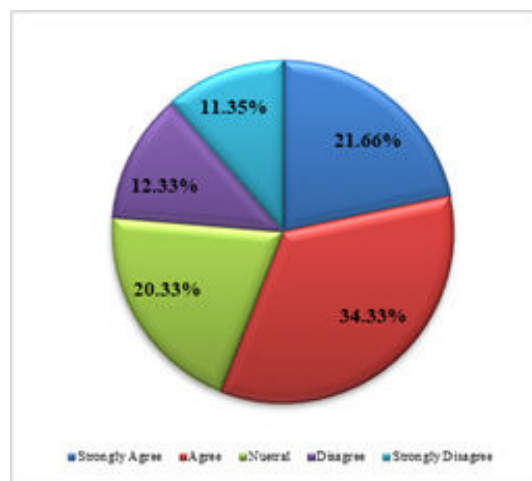


Fig.3. Affection of society by web series

4.4 Compromised or Avoided Physical and Social Activity

Online platforms deliver content that engages early adolescents and youth, who make up a large share of digitally active audiences. As shown in Figure 4, respondents reported that web series viewing is associated with reduced outdoor activity and disruption to daily routines, at least some of the time. This pattern may reflect broader internet and content engagement among youth, alongside reduced time for family and social interaction. Respondents reported that eating schedules, study, work, and family time were generally less affected.

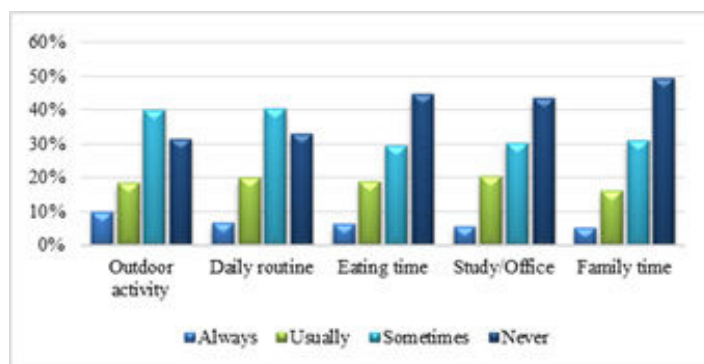
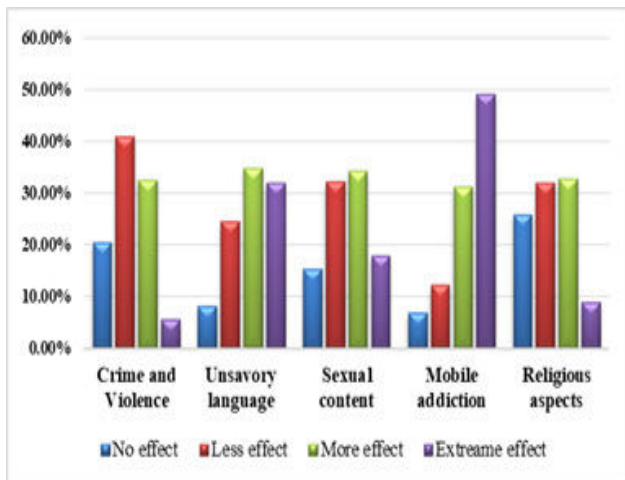


Fig.4. Compromise or avoiding Physical and social activity

4.5 Factors Perceived to Negatively Affect Society

Fig.5. Negative effects on society through several factors



4.6 Physical Health Problems

Web series content is widely accessible and consumed by large audiences. OTT platforms' design, which enables continuous and unrestricted viewing, has been associated in prior research with binge-watching behaviour. This pattern may pose potential physical health risks. Prolonged exposure to audio-visual stimuli may place strain on the eyes, and repeated exposure to loud noise has been linked in the literature to hearing difficulties.

Figure 6 shows that approximately 40% of respondents sometimes experienced headaches, eye irritation, or neck discomfort after extended web series viewing, though these symptoms were not constant. Most respondents did not report ear or back problems in association with their viewing habits.

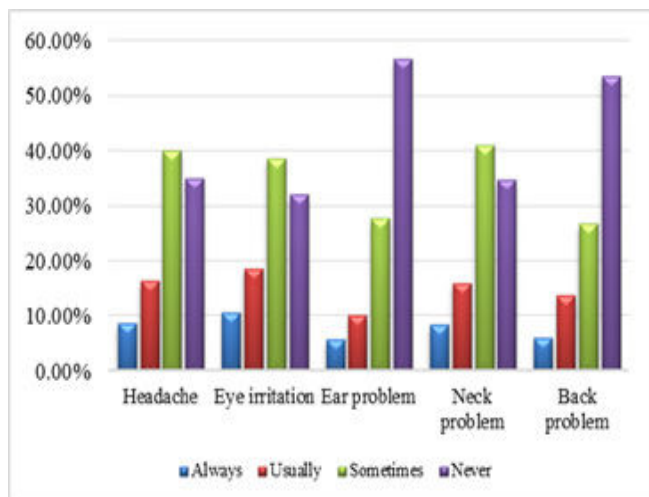


Fig.6. Physical health problems of viewers

4.7 Psychological Health Problems

Prior research has associated web series viewing with a range of physical and psychological outcomes. Reported concerns include insomnia, symptoms of anxiety and depression, and obesity. Some regular viewers report that their psychological well-being was affected in ways they had not anticipated. The term "Couch potato habit" has been used to describe a pattern associated with illnesses such as obesity, heart disease, and depression. Sleep affects quality of life, cognitive function, and physical health more broadly. As shown in Figure 7, most respondents did not report symptoms of anxiety, depression, or obesity associated with their viewing habits. Responses regarding insomnia were more evenly split: roughly one-third of respondents reported no sleep disturbance, while another third reported experiencing sleep deprivation associated with web series consumption.

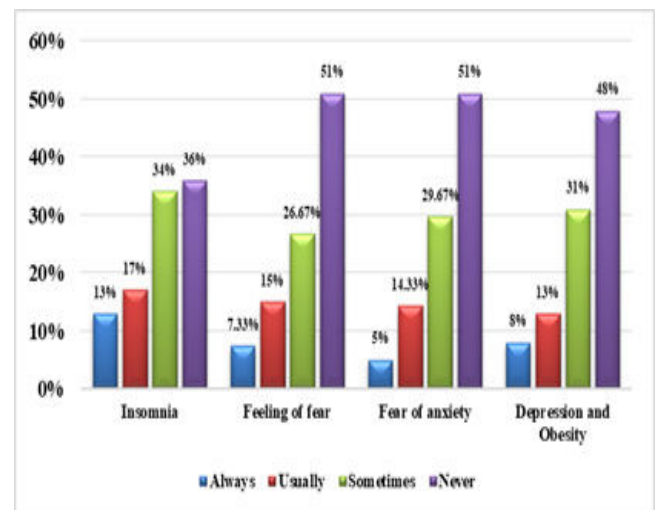


Fig.7. Psychological health problems of viewers

4.8 Opinions on Future Content Direction

Traditional and new media differ considerably in the content elements associated with web series. Web series are often associated with depictions of crime and violence, sexual content, coarse language, and reduced censorship. Some respondents suggested that unregulated content presentation may create confusion about appropriate viewing norms. In contrast, others valued the creative freedom that reduced censorship affords, including the emergence of more diverse, women-centred narratives.

Figure 8 presents respondents' views on whether specific content elements should be added, removed, or

left unchanged in web series. Approximately half of respondents indicated they were comfortable with current levels of coarse language and depictions of crime and violence. Notably, demand for women-centred content appears to be increasing. Approximately half of respondents felt that censorship should not be imposed on web series, possibly reflecting a preference for creative freedom to portray difficult subject matter.

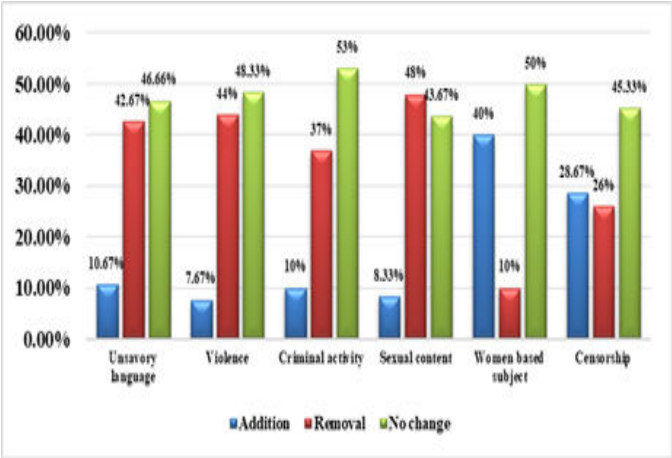


Fig.8. Future opinion on several factors

Table 1 Watching web series Vs negatively affecting society in terms of Crime and Violence

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp-totic Sig-nificance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square		6	.160
Likelihood Ratio	9.357	6	.154
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.361	1	.037
N of Valid Cases	150		

Table 2 Watching web series vs negatively affecting society in terms of Abusive language

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp-totic Sig-nificance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square		6	.002

Likelihood Ratio		6	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association		1	.002
N of Valid Cases	150		

Table 3 Watching web series vs negatively affecting society in terms of Social activity

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp-totic Sig-nificance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square		6	.017
Likelihood Ratio		6	.018
Linear-by-Linear Association	.131	1	.717
N of Valid Cases	150		

Table 1 indicates no statistically significant association between web series viewing frequency and perceived effects on crime and violence, $\chi^2(6, N=150)=9.26, p=.160$. This suggests that, within this subsample, viewers did not significantly associate web series consumption with societal concerns about crime and violence. The linear-by-linear association was significant, $\chi^2(1, N=150)=4.36, p=.037$, indicating a possible weak linear trend even where the omnibus test was not significant. Table 2 shows a statistically significant association between viewing frequency and perceived impact on abusive language, $\chi^2(6, N=150)=20.50, p=.002$, suggesting viewers perceive a link between web series content and societal norms around coarse language. Table 3 shows a significant association between viewing frequency and perceived effects on social activity, $\chi^2(6, N=150)=15.47, p=.017$. However, the linear-by-linear association was not significant, $\chi^2(1, N=150)=0.13, p=.717$, indicating no clear linear trend. Effect sizes (Cramer’s V) are not reported here as the contingency table dimensions were not available at the time of revision; these should be calculated and added before submission. As these are cross-sectional, self-reported survey data, these results indicate association, not causation, and should be interpreted with that caveat.

Table 4 Group Statistics of Independent Sample T-Test

	For web series, have you avoided or compromised with [Sleeping habits]	N	Std. Deviation
1. Do you watch web series?	Always	26	.788
	Usually	50	.781

Table 5 Group Statistics of Independent Samples t-Test

	4. If yes, then what is your stand towards web series that affect society?	N	Std. Deviation
Do you think web series are negatively affecting the society in the terms of [Abusive language]	Strongly Agree	29	1.004
	Agree	54	.887

Table 4 compares reported sleep-pattern compromise between respondents who “always” watch web series and those who watch “usually.” The “always” group had a lower mean ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 0.79$, $n = 26$) than the “usually” group ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 0.78$, $n = 50$), suggesting a modestly greater tendency toward sleep compromise among the “usually” group. An independent-samples t-test value and effect size (Cohen’s d) could not be computed from the summary statistics alone; the t-value, degrees of freedom, and exact p-value from the original SPSS output should be added here.

Table 5 compares perceived negative societal impact of web series (in terms of abusive language) between respondents who “strongly agree” and “agree” that such impact exists. The “strongly agree” group had a higher mean ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.00$, $n = 29$) than the “agree” group

($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.89$, $n = 54$). As with Table 4, the inferential t-test statistics should be added from the original SPSS output to complete APA-style reporting.

5. Conclusion

In summary, this study finds that web series consumption is associated with a range of self-reported physical, psychological, and social effects among the youth sampled. Web series are widely consumed and appear to occupy a substantial share of young viewers’ leisure time, often via prolonged, sedentary viewing sessions. Content elements such as crime, violence, coarse language, and reduced censorship appear to be associated with perceived shifts in attitudes and, in some respondents’ views, behaviour. Given the cross-sectional design of this study, these findings should be interpreted as associations rather than causal effects; longitudinal or experimental designs would be needed to establish causation. The findings nonetheless point to physical and mental health risk indicators associated with web series consumption among youth and suggest a need for greater attention to balanced media consumption in this population.

6. Future Scope and Limitations

This study was limited to young adults in the Smart Cities of Indore and Bhopal, and its cross-sectional design does not permit causal conclusions. Future research could examine health-related risks beyond the physical and psychological domains covered here and extend sampling to rural as well as urban populations.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest associated with this research paper.

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