

Work and health issues of the transgender population: factors associated with entering the labor market in the state of São Paulo, Brazil

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Abstract *The transgender population encounters several barriers in entering the labor market, which further impacts their health. In this cross-sectional study, the factors associated with their insertion in the formal job market were analyzed. Participants were recruited in seven municipalities of the state of São Paulo between 2014 and 2015. Logistic regression was used to estimate the odds ratios (OR) of the association between formal insertion and selected characteristics. We included 672 individuals, of which 82.3% were working, 13.1% were not employed, and 4.6% were not in the labor market. Among those working, only 16.7% were in the formal labor market. Factors independently associated with formal employment were: being a trans man, having 12 years or more of education, being under follow-up for gender transition procedures in the healthcare services, having private health insurance, and never having been arrested. Our results highlight part of the obstacles the transgender population has to overcome to enter the labor market, and point to the need for public policies specifically designed for the transgender population aiming to reduce school dropout and expand access to comprehensive health care, thereby reducing their vulnerability.*

Key words *Transgender people, Labor market, Stigma, Discrimination*

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Introduction

The transgender population faces barriers to access formal social institutions such as health and work¹⁻⁶. At the structural level, public policies aimed at the inclusion of transgender people in educational and healthcare systems, as well as the labor market, are lacking. Unemployment and difficulty to enter the labor market are also associated with the stigma and discrimination experienced by this population^{7,8}.

In addition to being recognized as a fundamental human right⁹, working allows the individual the means to afford basic necessities and it has direct repercussions on the living and health conditions of any population¹⁰⁻¹². Work status is also considered an important social determinant of health¹³.

The economic, social, and political context of Brazil, combined with changes in the productive structure, does not guarantee the employment protection legislation to be applied to all workers¹⁴⁻¹⁶, resulting in two types of work conditions: a formal and an informal labor market. The formal labor market is composed by workers with salaries, who are supported by a set of labor laws and protection benefits. The informal labor market includes activities carried out without the support of the labor legislation^{11,14-17}.

Few studies have investigated the insertion in the labor market of transgender people in Brazil and the world. In general, such studies are exploratory and restricted to the Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) context, especially HIV infection^{5,18-21}.

A better knowledge of the *travesti* and transsexual population conditions in relation to the labor market in the state of São Paulo could highlight the magnitude of the issue and help the developing public policies. The aim of this study was to identify the factors associated with formal employment of transgender people in the state of São Paulo.

Methods

This study analyzed data from the cross-sectional study "Vulnerabilities, health demands, and access to services of the *travestis* and transsexuals population in the State of São Paulo" - "the Muriel Project"²².

The project included 673 transsexuals who accessed healthcare and social assistance services in seven municipalities in the state of São Paulo

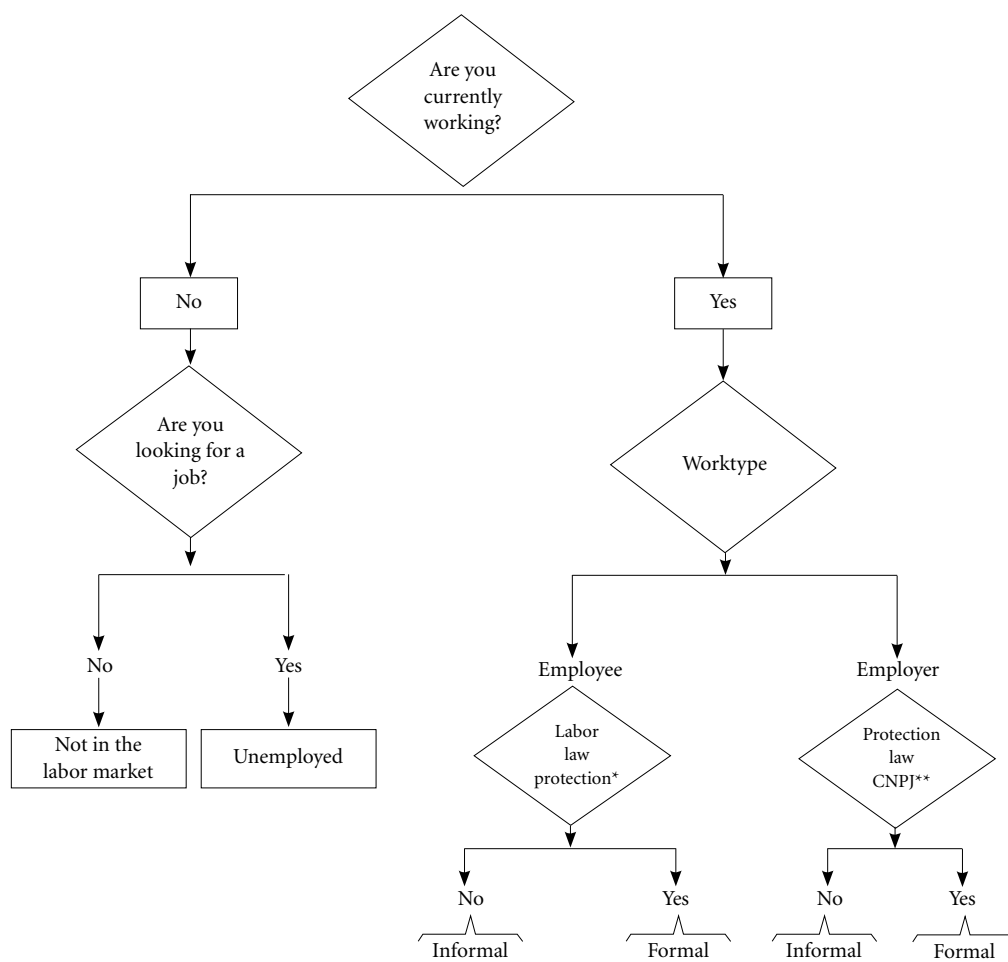
(São Paulo, Campinas, São Bernardo do Campo, Santo André, Santos, São José do Rio Preto, and Piracicaba). The sample size was calculated by mapping *travestis* and transgender people enrolled or attending some activity developed by the healthcare and social assistance services in 2012, in the abovementioned cities.

Participants were selected by consecutively sampling *travestis* and transsexuals using the above services, and by the snowball technique, which is based on social networks. The inclusion criteria were: being 16 years old or older at the time of the interview, being a *travesti*, transsexual or transgender, and living in the state of São Paulo for at least six months.

The data collection instrument included questions on seven subjects: sociodemographic, professional background, health conditions, sexual and reproductive health, violation of human rights and discrimination, social context, and transgender transition path. The questionnaire was applied in a face-to-face interview by a trained interviewer using a tablet. Data collection occurred from mid-2014 to January 2015. For the present study, data from the questions related to work status were used.

Participants' profession was investigated through the following questions: "Do you currently work?", and if yes, "What is the employment relationship", if not, "How do you live?", "Has it been difficult for you to find a job?" Participants who reported that they were currently working were considered workers. Workers were classified as formal or informal, adapted from categories used by the IBGE in the Continued National Survey of Household Samples (PNAD)²³ (Figure 1). Formal workers were those formally employed, municipal, state or military civil servants, paid interns, and employers with CNPJ (Brazilian legal person). Informal workers were those without a contract, who reported working for themselves or for employers without CNPJ.

The dependent variable was being in the formal labor market (yes or no). The independent variables were: gender identity (transsexual woman/*travesti* or transsexual man), years of education (8 or less, 9 to 11, and 12 or more), age group in years (16 to 24, 25 to 39, 40 and over), race / skin color (white, black, brown, yellow, indigenous, ignored), having ever moved from the city of birth (yes or no), having a name change in documents (yes, no, or ignored), having a technical / vocational training or course (yes or no), having ever felt discriminated (yes or no), having ever been arrested (yes or no), type of me-



* Registered employment

** Company registered as a legal person

Figure 1. Fluxogram of work status definition.

Source: Authors.

dical follow-up (not on follow-up, follow-up for AIDS or sexually transmitted infections (STIs), or follow-up for gender transition process and others), being under medical follow-up (yes or no); being under follow-up for a transsexual process (yes or no), having a private health insurance (yes, no).

A descriptive analysis of the variables was performed. Bivariate and multivariate analysis was used to assess factors related to formal employment. The crude and adjusted odds ratios (OR) were calculated for each independent variable, with the respective 95% confidence intervals (95% CI), using the logistic regression model. Variables with a $p \leq 0.20$ in the bivariate

analysis were tested in the multivariate model, in ascending order (forward stepwise selection). Variables with a 95% confidence interval that did not include nullity (OR = 1.00) remained in the model, using the maximum likelihood ratio. The fit of the model was verified with the Hosmer and Lemeshow test (goodness-of-fit). All statistical analyzes were performed in the STATA® software, version 13.0.

The project was designed and conducted according to the ethical standards in research with human beings in Brazil and was approved by the CRT/DST AIDS ethics committee, of the SMS-SP and SMS-Santo André. Participants signed the Informed Consent Form. People diagnosed

with a health problem were referred to public health services or social assistance for treatment and follow-up.

Results

From a total sample of 673 interviews, 672 had valid information and were analyzed. Of those, 82.3% were from employed people, 13.1% not employed, and 4.6% were out of the labor market (Table 1). Regarding the type of occupation, 53.9% were self-employed and 27.2% were employees, but only 14% of them had contracts protected by the labor law. About 40% of respondents were sex workers (Table 1).

The gender identities reported were: transsexual man (7%), transsexual woman or *travestis* (90.4%), and in 2.5% of the sample ($n = 17$) this information was ignored.

The average age of the sample was 32 years, 50.4% were in the age group from 25 to 39 years, 62% self-reported being of white race / skin color, 16.2% had 12 years or more of study, and 60.5% owned or rented their home. The current place of residence of most participants (49.5%) was the municipality of São Paulo. As for the other characteristics, 56.8% had some technical / vocational education, 37.9% contributed to the National Institute of Social Security (INSS), 25.4% had been previously imprisoned, 13% were undergoing medical follow-up for the sex reassignment procedures, and 16.3% had medical insurance. The distribution of the sample characteristics is shown in Table 2.

For the bivariate analysis of factors associated with entering the formal labor market, only the 528 working participants were included, excluding 119 persons that were not working and 25 others for whom the variables of interest were blank or had an unknown response (Table 3). The proportion of formal employment was 16.7%. Formal employment was 59.4% among transsexual men and 13.9 among transsexual women; transsexual men had nine times higher chance of entering the formal labor market than transsexual women (Table 3).

Among participants with 12 years or more of education, the chance of entering the formal labor market was almost 19 times higher compared to those with 8 years or less of study. In the bivariate analysis, being under follow-up for the gender transition process was associated with a formal job compared with those who were not being followed up medically (Table 3).

Table 1. Work characteristics of a sample of transgender people from seven municipalities in the state of São Paulo interviewed from 2014 to 2015.

Variables	Total	
Occupation Condition		
Working	553	82.3
Not working	88	13.1
Outside the labor market	31	4.6
Position in occupation		
Self-employed	362	53.9
Employee	183	27.2
Employer	4	0.6
Intern	2	0.3
Not working	119	17.7
Ignored	2	0.3
Occupation according to CBO		
Service workers, salespeople in shops and markets *	410	61.0
Administrative service workers	39	5.8
Science and arts professionals	19	2.8
Mid-level technicians	17	2.5
Industrial goods and service production workers	15	2.2
Chemical goods and service production workers	6	0.9
Senior members of the government, leaders of public interest organizations	3	0.4
Maintenance and repair workers	3	0.4
Agricultural sector	1	0.1
Not working	119	17.7
Ignored	40	6.0
Activity duration in years		
Less than two years	67	10.0
Two to three years	94	14.0
Over three years	340	50.6
Not working	119	17.7
Ignored	52	7.7
Formal labor market		
No	459	68.3
Yes	94	14.0
Not working	119	17.7
Sex Workers		
No	280	41.7
Yes	273	40.6
Not working	119	17.7
Total	672	100.0

Source: Muriel Project.

In the final model, the following characteristics were independently associated with having a formal job: being a transsexual man (OR = 2.7; 95%CI = 1.7-6.5), having 12 years or more of study (OR = 7.5; 95%CI 2.7-20.1), receiving some type of medical follow-up (OR = 1.8; 95% CI 1.0-4.4), being followed up for gendertransition process (OR = 2.1; 95%CI 1.0-3.4), having private health insurance (OR = 2.8; 95%CI 1.5-5.1), and never having been arrested (OR = 3.3; 95%CI 1.2-8.9) (Table 4).

Table 2. Sociodemographic characteristics of a sample of transgender people from seven municipalities in the state of São Paulo interviewed from 2014 to 2015.

Variables	Total	
	N	%
Present city of residence		
São Paulo	336	50.0
Campinas	104	15.4
Grande SP	56	8.3
Interior	115	17.1
Coast	58	8.6
Ignored	3	0.45
Gender identity		
Trans men	47	6.9
Trans woman / travestis	608	90.4
Ignored	17	2.5
Age group in years		
16 to 24	178	26.4
25 to 39	339	50.4
40 and over	155	23.0
Race/skin color		
White	253	37.6
Brown	289	43.0
Black	101	15.0
Yellow	13	1.90
Native	13	1.93
Not answered	3	0.4
Years of education		
8 or less	234	34.8
9 to 11	329	48.9
12 or more	109	16.2
Type of home		
Provisional residence	254	37.8
Own house / rented apartment	407	60.5
Ignored	11	1.6
Change of name in any document		
No	613	91.2
Yes	58	8.6
Ignored	1	0.1

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Discussion

The percentage of participants in our study that were in the formal labor market was extremely low: 16.7%. The factors associated with having a formal employment were being a trans man, having at least 12 years of education, receiving some medical follow-up, being followed up for the gender transition process, having a private medical insurance, and never having been arrested.

Data from the Monthly Employment Survey (PME) of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)²⁴ show that, compared to our findings, the percentage of the general population in the metropolitan region of São Paulo with a formal job was much higher in 2014 and 2015 (55.3% and 54.9%, respectively).

Table 2. Sociodemographic characteristics of a sample of transgender people from seven municipalities in the state of São Paulo interviewed from 2014 to 2015.

Variables	Total	
	N	%
Has technical / vocational training or course		
Yes	382	56.8
No	290	43.1
Monthly income in minimum wages (MW)		
Less than one	186	27.6
1 to 2	187	27.8
2 to 3	124	18.4
Above 3	128	19.0
Ignored	47	6.9
Contributes to the INSS		
No	412	61.3
Yes	256	38.1
Ignored	4	0.6
Have you ever been arrested in your life		
No	501	74.5
Yes	171	25.4
Type of medical follow-up		
Is not on follow up	274	40.7
Follow-up for sexually transmitted disease	217	32.2
Follow-up for sexual transition process	88	13.1
Others	93	13.8
Have medical insurance / private health insurance		
No	560	83.3
Yes	110	16.3
Ignored	2	0.3
Total	672	100.0

Source: Muriel Project.

Table 3. Bivariate analysis of factors associated with entering the formal labor market of a sample of transgender people from seven municipalities in the state of São Paulo interviewed from 2014 to 2015*.

Variables	Formal job		Total		Odds Ratio (OR)	95%CI	p
	Yes						
	N	%	N	%			
Gender identity							
Transsexual woman/Travestis	69	13,9	496	100	1	-	
Transsexual man	19	59,4	32	100	9,04	4.27 - 19.14	<0.000
Years of studies							
Less than or equal to 8	6	3,2	187	100	1	-	
9 to 11	50	19,4	258	100	7,25	3.03 - 17.30	<0.000
12 years and over	32	38,6	83	100	18,92	7.50 - 47.76	
Age group in years							
16 to 24	16	11,9	134	100	1	-	
25 to 39	53	19	279	100	1,72	0.94 - 3.15	0,074
40 and more	19	16,5	115	100	1,45	0.71 - 2.99	0,302
Did you ever move from your birth town							
Yes	61	14,6	419	100	1	-	
No	27	24,8	109	100	1,93	1.15 - 3.22	0,012
Change of name in any document							
No	76	15,8	482	100	1	-	
Yes	12	26,1	46	100	1,88	0.93 - 3.80	0,077
Have you had technical / vocational training or course							
No	26	11,5	226	100	1	-	
Yes	62	20,5	302	100	1,98	1.21 - 3.25	0,007
Have you ever felt discriminated							
Yes	71	15,6	455	100	1	-	
No	17	23,3	73	100	1,64	0.90 - 2.98	0,105
Have you ever been arrested in your life							
Yes	5	4	126	100	1	-	
No	83	20,6	402	100	6,29	2.49 - 15.90	0
Are you under medical follow-up							
No	25	10,8	232	100	1	-	
Yes	63	21,3	296	100	2,23	1.358 - 3.689	0.002
Are you under follow-up for the gender transition process							
No	59	12,7	465	100	1	-	
Yes	29	46	63	100	5,86	3.333 - 10.333	<0.000
Do you have private health insurance							
No	52	11,8	440	100	1	-	
Yes	36	40,9	88	100	5,16	3.089 - 8.638	<0.00
Total	88	16,7	528	100	-	-	

* 528 that were currently working were included.

Source: Muriel Project.

The percentage of the transsexual population in informal jobs was much higher than that of the general population (25.9% in 2015)²⁵. This difference is not an exclusively Brazilian phenomenon. In a study with 6,450 transgender people in the United States in 2011, the frequency of non-em-

ployed persons was double that found in the general population⁸. In addition, our data probably also reflect the socioeconomic situation in Brazil in recent years, in which an increase in informal employment occurred, aggravating the inequality regarding transsexual people, who were already

victims of stigma and discrimination and had more difficulty getting a formal employment^{18,19}.

Although work informality can take place by choice, the lack of contributions to the social security system makes an informal worker more vulnerable^{11,25}. Contributing to the social security system guarantees income in case of leaving work, whether due to retirement, illness, disability, or unemployment. In Brazil, workers with a formal contract automatically make contributions and are entitled to the benefits, which is much less frequent among the unemployed and informal workers^{11,17}. In the present study, close to 80% of informal workers did not contribute to the social security system, while in the general population the annual average was 22.0% in 2014 and 2015²⁴. Values similar to ours were found by Bonassi in Santa Catarina: 74% of transsexuals or *travestis* reported not contributing to the social security system^{19,24}.

The unemployed transsexual population in our study had financial difficulties: 37.8% lived in temporary homes and more than half reported living with a monthly income of less than two minimum wages. The average income in the

general population in 2014 and 2015 in the metropolitan region of São Paulo was slightly more than three minimum wages²⁴.

The occupation reported by 40% of the interviewees in this study was sex work, which corroborates the findings of other studies^{18,26}. Although sex work is included in the Brazilian Classification of Occupations - CBO²⁷, its activities are not regulated in Brazil and carried out entirely informally. Entering the labor market as a sex worker is probably one of the results of the stigma suffered by transsexual people, which also motivates early school drop-out that leads to low rates of professional training. In addition, transsexual sex workers are extremely vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections, being one of the groups most affected globally by HIV infection²⁸⁻³⁰.

Transsexual men were more likely to have a formal job than transsexual women or *travesti*. The finding could be due to the influence of the general appearance being in agreement with the gender identity of transsexual men after the use of hormones, which would protect them from being identified as transsexual, and, consequently, be less discriminated.

Table 4. Final model for factors associated with transgender people from seven municipalities in the state of São Paulo entering the formal labor market. Data was collected from 2014 to 2015*.

Variables	Crude odds ratio (OR)	Adjusted odds ratio (OR)	Adjusted 95%CI	p*
Gender identity				
Transsexual woman/travestis	1,00	1,00	-	0,020
Transsexual man	9,04	2,77	1.172 6.546	
Years of studies				
8 or less	1,00	1,00	-	
9 to 11	7,25	4,91	1.997 12.0845	0,001
12 and more	18,92	7,50	2.794 20.158	<0,000
Under medical follow up				
No	1,00	1,00	-	
Yes	2,23	1,87	1.015 3.447	0,044
Under follow-up for gender transition process				
No	1,00	1,00	-	
Yes	5,86	2,14	1.058 4.364	0,034
Has private health insurance				
No	1,00	1,00	-	<0,000
Yes	5,16	2,86	1.588 5.179	
Has ever been arrested				
Yes	1,00	1,00	-	0,015
No	6,29	3,36	1.268 8.950	

* P adjusted.

Source: Muriel Project.

Studies also indicate that the gender inequality in the work environment of cisgender people is reproduced in the transsexual population²⁴. Corroborating this hypothesis, a study carried out in the USA showed that after gender transition, the probability of transsexual women finding a job is lower than men⁸. According to reports by transsexual women interviewed in Salvador, the difficulties entering the formal job market were much greater after gender transition³¹. In contrast, transsexual men had a greater chance of finding formal work or improving their income after gender transition³²⁻³⁴. The study by Davidson³³ demonstrated that transsexual women are more discriminated at hiring, as their job applications get more refusals than those of transsexual men. This differentiation was observed in other categories of the analysis, showing that transsexual women have worse jobs and lower wages³³.

The percentage of transsexuals with higher education in our study was 16.2%, while in the general population of the metropolitan region of São Paulo this percentage was 66%²⁴. Similar results were found in other regions of Brazil. Bonassi et al.¹⁹, in a study carried out in Santa Catarina, reported that 33.9% (N = 100) of transsexuals and *travestis* dropped out of school at between 16 and 19 years of age. In the metropolitan region of Recife, of 100 *travestis* interviewed between 2008 and 2009, 17.4% had less than four years of education and 44.9% did not complete elementary school³⁵.

Our data showed that having 12 years or more of study is a factor positively associated with entering the formal job market. However, this finding is not consistent in the literature. Bauer³⁶, studying discrimination and prejudice against transsexuals in Canada, found a high frequency of highly educated transsexuals who were not in the labor market or had employment levels below their degree of qualification. In Brazil, Rondas and Machado mention that, although recommended, achieving high education does not guarantee this population will enter the labor market¹⁸. The low education level of the transgender population can be explained, among other factors, by the hostile environment of schools for those people. In the USA in 2011, transsexuals reported having suffered harassment (78%), physical aggression (35%), and sexual violence (12%) at school due to their gender identity⁸.

An association was found between access to healthcare, such as being monitored for the gender transition process and having a private medical insurance, and having a formal job. The rea-

sons that allowed having one of the scarce spots in the healthcare services for transition procedures might be similar to the reasons for which other barriers were broken, such as education and access to the formal labor market. In Brazil, between 2008 and 2015, data from the Hospital Information System of the Unified Health System (SIH-SUS) indicate that only 320 surgeries were performed for sex reassignment, and there are long waiting lines for the procedure³⁷. Other studies also report relationships between access to the labor market and the gender transition procedures.

The International Labor Organization PRIDE study²⁶ reported that among the difficulties transsexual people face entering the labor market were: having a gender expression incompatible with the name in official identification documents and presenting an incomplete gender transition due to difficulties in accessing the necessary services²⁶. In Brazil, a 2012 study found that among the various reasons for not undergoing transgender transition were: disadvantages of finding a formal job due to discrimination and insufficient financial resources to fund the process². Gender transition procedures might also interfere with professional insertion due to the long period required for recovery and special care after a sexual reassignment surgery³⁸. For formally employed people, the required leave of absence is covered by income from the social security system, which is rarely the case with informal workers.

Our findings corroborate the considerations of Almeida et al.³⁹, who emphasize the need to consider all the factors involved in the complex health status and health determinants of the transsexual population, and that interventions should not be focused on body manipulations only.

As for study limitations, participants were selected in specialized health services – including a comprehensive healthcare clinic for *travestis* and transsexuals – and social assistance centers, which could result in selection bias. In addition, the original study was not designed with the objective of investigating insertion in the labor market. However, it was a population-based study with a large sample that included people from different regions of the state of São Paulo. Therefore, our findings provide new information on the access to the labor market of transsexual people.

The low percentage of transsexual people in formal jobs was a highlight, which shows their increased vulnerability. Public policies for inclusive actions in educational institutions, promoting

tolerance and respect for the diversities of gender identity are key to reverse the school dropout scenario and consequently the low educational level of this population. Another important aspect to reduce the inequalities experienced by transsexuals in the labor market is the need to increase access to gender transition process in the Unified Health System.

In summary, our results indicate the need for public policies aiming at reducing stigma and discrimination and improving access to education and professional qualification for transgender people, making the competition for a position in the formal job market more equitable.

Collaborations

MA Silva and CG Luppi worked on the data analysis and interpretation, writing of the manuscript, and approval of the version to be published. MASM Veras worked on the conception, design, dataanalysis and interpretation, writing of the manuscript, and approval of the version to be published.

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