Exploring the Link Between Personality Traits, Peer Influence, and School Truancy in Adolescents: A Comparative Study of Truant and Punctual Students

* Muhammad Aqeel, PhD
Foundation University Islamabad, Rawalpindi Campus, Pakistan
Humaira Jami, PhD, Ambreen Sadia,
National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam, University, Islamabad, Pakistan
and Tasnim Renha, PhD
National University for Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan

School truancy remains a persistent educational and clinical challenge worldwide, particularly within marginalised communities. This study aimed to examine the role of peer influence and personality traits in predicting school truancy in Pakistani truant and punctual adolescents. Purposive sampling was used based with a cross-sectional design. Two psychological standard instruments, the Urdu versions of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Junior (EPQ-J) and the Index of Peer Influence (IPI), were administered to examine personality traits and peer influence in truant and punctual adolescents. This study's findings revealed that truant students exhibited higher levels of extraversion and psychotic personality traits; however, punctual students exposed higher levels of neuroticism. Moreover, logistic regression analysis exhibited peer influence related to drug use was significant predicting by extraversion and psychotic personality in truant students. These results recommended that truant school students were more vulnerable to peer pressure, particularly concerning drug-related activities, as compared to punctual students. This research offers valuable insights to comprehend underlying mechanisms related to personality and peer influence and school truancy for educational and clinical contexts, with implications for the development of indigenous interventions aimed at mitigating school truancy and improving academic performance in Pakistani contexts.

Keywords: Personality Traits, Peer Influence, Truancy, Punctuality, School Truancy, Adolescents

School truancy remains a persistent global problem that poses significant risks for middle and high school-going students(Aqeel & Rehna, 2020; Gonzálvez et al., 2018; Kearney, 2008, 2022; Osborne et al., 2024; Rogers et al., 2024; Tahira & Jami, 2021; Villadsen et al., 2024). It is commonly defined as unexcused or ill-gel absenteeism without higher school authority or parental consent and is associated with many adverse outcomes such as personal or social disengagement, academic underachievement, and mental health problems (Aqeel et al., 2017; Fatima et al., 2022; Fornander & Kearney, 2020; Maynard et al., 2017; Shuja et al., 2021). It is a very important factor contributing to poor self-esteem, dropout rates, involvement in delinquent behaviours, and internalising and externalising behaviour problems (Aqeel et al., 2016; Munawar et al., 2021; Osborne et al., 2024; Rogers et al., 2024; Shahzad et al., 2021; Tahira & Jami, 2021; Villadsen et al., 2024). School truancy manifestations and definitions vary significantly across cultures or contexts, although there is growing agreement on its detrimental effects (Aqeel et al., 2020; Aqeel & Akhtar, 2017; Bhatti et al., 2023; Maynard et al., 2017; Sarfraz et al., 2021).

Personality traits, especially neuroticism, psychoticism, and extraversion, along with negative peer influence, are frequently highlighted as deterimental and critical factors in the development of truant behaviour in adolescents. According to Eysenck's theory of personality, these personality traits may incline individuals to engage in delinquent and antisocial behaviours of school adolescents (Eysenck, 1970, 1985). Similar previous studies have shown that extraversion, defined by impulsiveness and sociability, is associated with a higher susceptibility to risk-taking

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr Muhammad Aqeel, Foundation University Islamabad, Rawalpindi Campus, Pakistan. Email: aqeel.1924@gmail.com

behaviours and peer pressure such as truancy (Brouwer-Borghuis et al., 2019; Heyne et al., 2019; Maynard et al., 2018; Rasasingham, 2015; Tolin et al., 2009). On the other hand, neuroticism is also associated with emotional instability and anxiety, and it has been found to contribute both indirectly and directly to recurrent delinquent behaviours (Abbasi & Aqeel, 2023; Aqeel et al., 2022; Aqeel & Akhtar, 2017; Kearney, 2008, 2016; Munawar et al., 2021; Naeem et al., 2023; Tariq et al., 2023). Psychoticism that includes traits such as lack of empathy and impulsivity, which is frequently linked to more severe forms of antisocial behaviour(Aqeel et al., 2022; Gallé-Tessonneau et al., 2019; Johnsen et al., 2022; Nisar et al., 2020). Many prior studies findings highlighted the importance of both peer influence and personality traits in shaping and triggering true behavior (Aqeel et al., 2022; Gallé-Tessonneau et al., 2019; Johnsen et al., 2022; Nisar et al., 2020).

Peer influence plays an important role in the development of adolescent behaviour in school contexts, particularly in the setting of school truancy. Young adolescents habitually prioritise peer acceptance or pressure from their friends, which may lead to truant behaviours, especially when they are affiliated with groups involved in delinquent activities (Armstrong et al., 1997; von Klinggraeff et al., 2022). Several previous stdies demonstrated that truant adolescents studnets are more probability to linked to peers engaged in risky behaviors, such as substance use and delinquency behavior (Aqeel et al., 2018; Khan & Aqeel, 2022; Naeem & Chaman, 2022). Therefore, both peer influence and personality traits are considered a crucial factor which contributes development of school truancy, as adolescents students may be predisposed by their personality tendencies and the social dynamics of their affiliated peer groups in school and outside school primise(Gul et al., 2022; Peters & Aqeel, 2020; Shuja et al., 2020, 2022). The current study underscores the critical need to address both individual psychological factors and social influences to reduce school truancy within the Pakistani context. It aims to investigate the role of personality traits and peer influence in predicting truancy among school-going adolescents. It also investigated the association among personality traits and peer influence in both truant and punctual adolescents. Moreover, it examined differences between truant and punctual adolescents personality traits and peer influence.

Earlier studies have exposed that personality traits are directly and indirectly linked to enhanced delinquent and antisocial behaviours, whereas peer influence can more provoke these vulnerable tendencies in school situations(Aqeel & Akhtar, 2017; Boccio et al., 2024; Fornander & Kearney, 2020). This study seeks to offer insights into the complex underlying psychosocial mechanisms driving school truancy. This study's results are likely to inform and guide the development of targeted indigenous interventions to mitigate and improve truancy and its related detrimental outcomes in the Pakistani school system.

Method

Research Design

Purposive sampling was employed within a cross-sectional design that is consisted of two phases. In Phase 1, the study evaluated the psychometric properties of the Index of Peer Influence scale in truant adolescents. In Phase 2, it studied the association between personality traits and peer influence in truant and punctual students. Additionally, the study explored differences in personality traits and peer influence in trant and punctual students.

Participants

hundred participants were recruited for the study, which is further comprised into 100 truant and 100 punctual student groups, with ages ranging from 12 to 18 years (M = 12, SD =.61). The participants were receuited from different public schools in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Pakistan. The sample was divided into two distinct groups: (1) truant students and (2) punctual students.The inclusion criteria for the truant group required students who had been absent for at least 21 days in the previous academic year without permission from school authorities or parents. These students were identified and confirmed through the consensus of class proctors and teachers. In contrast, punctual students were recruited from the same classes as the truant students to allow for comparison.

Measures

For current study following measures were used in the study:

Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ)

The EPQ was translated and adapted by Naqvi and Kamal (2010) to design to examine the personality traits of adolescents in a Pakistani context. It consists of 81 items and has four scales, including extraversion-introversion, psychoticism, and neuroticism, along with a Lie scale to make sure valid responses. It is a dichotomous scale, requiring participants to respond to their disagreement or agreement with each statement by replying either *Yes* (1) or *No* (0). It also comprises many negatively worded items (4, 9, 11, 16, 30, 40, 48, 63, 64, 69, 72, 75, 76, and 78). Higher scores on each subscale reveal a higher prevalence of that exact personality trait.

Index of Peer Influence (IPF)

It translated and adapted by Aziz (1991) in Phd thesis and designed to assess peer influence among adolescents. It consists of 14 items that measure the influence of peer groups and the nature of the participant's social circle. One of the items specifically addresses drug use by the respondent. The scale uses a 5-point rating system, ranging from 1 (*to a very little extent*) to 5 (*to a very great extent*), with higher scores indicating a greater level of peer influence.In this study, the IPF was further modified for use with truant samples, dividing it into two subscales: Relationship with Peers (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 9) and Peer Influence for Drug Use (items 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14). Higher scores on these subscales indicate a greater prevalence of peer influence in the respective areas.

Procedure

Two hundred participants truant students (*n* = 100) and punctual students (*n* = 100); age ranged from 12 to 18 years; they were enrolled from different public schools, parks, and internet cafes in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Pakistan. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Review Committee of the National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, following APA ethical guidelines. Written and verbal informed consent was obtained from both parents and participants.

Both Truant and punctual students were included with the mutual cooperation and consensus of teachers and proctors, using attendance records to differentiate between punctual and truant students in the present study. After obtaining verbal and written consent from parents and participants, they were informed on the study and provided clear instructions about the study and to complete the scales without a time limit. Cronbach's alpha coefficient, independent t-tests, and regression analyses were used to analyse data using SPSS-18. Exploratory factor analysis was also used to explore the underlying new indigenous factor stractor of the Index of Peer Influence to develop construct validity in the true sample. Moreover, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the EPQ,

IPF, and along their subscales was examined through Cronbach's alpha coefficient for both punctual and truant samples. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was used to examine the correlations between the EPQ and IPF and their subscales for truant and punctual students. Independent sample t-tests were also conducted to determine the differences between truant and punctual students on the study variables. Finally, simple logistic regression analysis was performed to predict the influence of these variables (Croce et al., 2001;Field, 2017; Kim, 2015; Nachar, 2008).

Results

EFA using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was performed to reveal the underlying covert structure and dimensionality, thus establishing the construct validity of the Index of Peer Influence (IPI) for truant students.

Table 1

*Exploratory Factor Analysis of Index of Peer Influence (N=100)*

Item no	Factor 1	Factor II
1	.21	.66
2	-.25	.60
3	.18	.62
4	-.27	.46
5	-.23	-.46
6	-	-
7	.43	.42
8	.22	.36
9	-.16	-.45
10	.56	.32
11	.88	.22
12	.67	.12
13	.86	.34
14	.64	.25
Eigen Values	3.14	2.21
% of variance	22.48	22.48
Cumulative %	15.79	38.28

Note. Factor 1= Relationship with Peer; Factor 2= Peer Influence for Drug Use

The EFA identified 14 items, which were further categorized into two distinct factors derived from the PCA of the IPF (see Table 1). Factor One comprises seven items (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 9), while Factor Two includes five items (10, 11, 12, 13, and 14). All items exhibited factor loadings greater than .40. Item 6 was discarded due to lack of significant loading, and Item 7 was identified as a double-loaded item, appearing on both factors with loadings exceeding .40. Consequently, both Items 6 and 7 were excluded from the final scale of the IPF (Cronbach, 1951).

Figure 1

Scree Plot Showing the Two-Factor Solution for Index of Peer Influence (N=100)
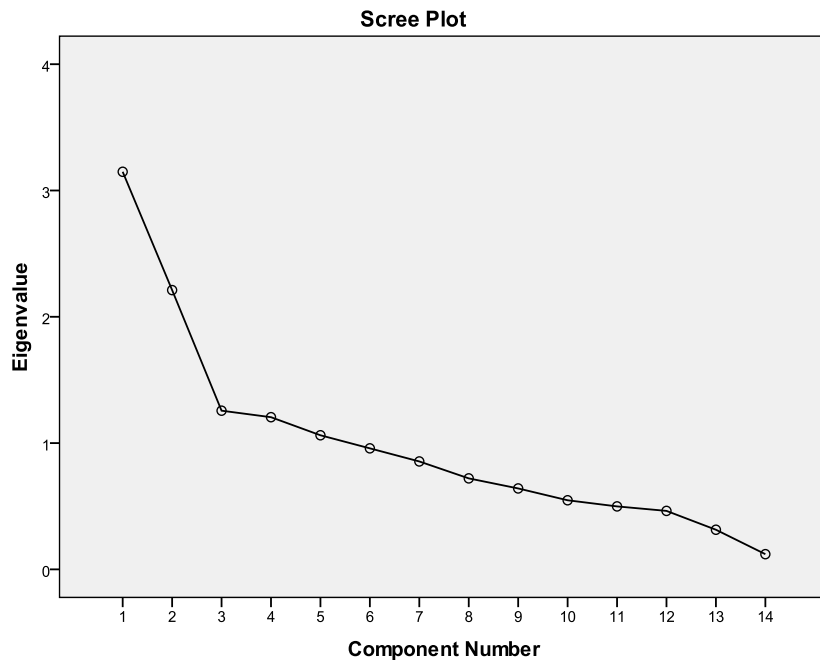
The Scree plot suggested a two-factor solution for the IPF in the true sample (see Figure 1). Factor 1 has an eigenvalue of 3.14, explaining 22.48% of the variance, whereas Factor 2 has an eigenvalue of 2.21, accounting for 15.7% of the variance for the true sample(Cattell, 1966; Fabrigar et al., 1999; Field, 2013b). Together, newly developed both factors account for 38.1% of the total variance (see Table 1). This two-factor structure offers a clear structure, with each factor taking a novel factors of peer influence as examined through the IPF.

The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure were applied to verify the appropriateness before conducting the analysis of the present sample.The Direct Oblimin method was used based on the assumption of item intercorrelation in the study. All items were retained based on their factor loadings, which further contributes to the final version of the scale. The KMO value was 0.67, which is demonstrating an acceptable and appropriate level of sampling adequacy for EFA analysis, as values closer to 1 recommend dense correlation patterns, which is allowing for reliable and distinct factor extraction. Moreover, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity provided a value of 755.17 and a significant value at $p \leq .001$, which also confirmed that the data were suitable for efa. Alpha cronback Reliability and item-total correlation analyses were further computed to determine the psychometric properties of the scale.

Table 2

Item Total Correlation of IPF and Its Subscales for the truant sample (N = 100)

Item No.	IPF Total	Factor 1	Factor 2
1	.46**	.51**	
2	.44**	.57**	
3	.56**	. .59**	
4	.44**	.51**	
5	.43**	.51**	
6	.41**	. .41**	
7	.40*	. 48**	
8	.18**		.67**
9	.38**		.86**
10	.29**		.70**
11	.39**		.84**
12	.37**		.64**

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

The findings revealed that the total score of the IPF exhibits significant positive correlations with all items, which is showing a high degree of internal consistency for the scale. In truant sample. Additionally, all items within both factors further reveal significant associations with the total score of their respective subscales. This finding highlighted the reliability of the IPF as a measure of peer influence.

Table 3

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Alpha Reliability of EPQ, IPF, and Their Subscales for Puntual

Scales	No. of items	M	SD	α
EPQ	81	43.94	5.93	.60
Extraversion	24	15.34	3.47	.59
Neuroticism	20	9.49	3.87	.72
Psychoticism	17	5.62	2.76	.59
Lie	20	14.09	3.44	.70
Index of peer influence	12	32.05	5.09	.48
Relationship with Peers	7	26.11	4.60	.52
Peer-Influence for Drug Use	5	5.94	2.34	.79

and Truant Students (N = 200)

The study's results demonstrate that the cronback alpha coefficient for the total scale of the EPQ is.60, which is reflecting moderate reliability to examine adolescents' personality traits. The reliability coefficients for the Lie subscales and neuroticism reveal consistency in extending along their constructs, whereas the psychoticism and extraversion subscales fall in an acceptable range. In opposition, the overall alpha coefficient for the IPF is.48, which is unsatisfactory; however, the subscales of the IPF exhibit satisfactory reliability.

Table 4

Correlation matrix of EPQ, IPF, and their Subscale for truant students (N = 100)

	Scales	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	EPQ	-	.45**	.54**	.49**	.22*	-.04	-.07	.10
2	Extraversion		-	-.10	-.05	-.02	.29**	.26**	.10
3	Neuroticism			-	.31**	-.36**	-.24*	-.24*	-.01
4	Psychoticism				-	-.22*	-.11	-.17	.15
5	Lie					-	-.03	-.02	-.01
6	Index of Peer Influence						-	.94**	.25*
7	Relationship with Peers							-	-.08
8	Peer-Influence for Drug Use								-

Note. EPQ = Eysenck personality questionnaire, *p < .05, **p < .01

   In Table 4, this study's findings demonstrate that the EPQ is significantly positively associated with psychoticism for truant students. Moreover, the IPF total scores further reveal reveals significant positive association with its subscales, which is supporting construct validity for the true sample. The extraversion trait is positively associated with overall peer influence scores and peer relationships subscale, but not associated with drug-related peer influence. Moreover, neuroticism traits are significantly linked to peer pressure for drug use in truant students

Table 5

	Scales	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	EPQ	-	.64**	.60**	.12	.29**	.25**	.25*	.06
2	Extraversion		-	.12	-.21*	.13	.48**	.52**	.05
3	Neuroticism			-	.25**	-.35**	.03	-.16	.29**
4	Psychoticism				-	-.50**	-.11	-.21*	.11
5	Lie					-	.01	.23*	-.32**
6	Index of Peer Influence						-	.81**	.51**
7	Relationship with Peers							-	-.07
8	Peer-Influence for Drug Use								-

Correlation matrix of EPQ, IPF, and their Subscale for punctual students (N = 100)

Note. EPQ = Eysenck personality questionnaire, *p < .05, **p < .01

   In table 5, this study's results reveal EPQ is significantly associated with IPF totals and its subscales for punctual students. Moreover, extraversion traits are positively associated with peer relationships but not associated with drug-related peer influence for punctual students. Neuroticism traits reveal a significant negative associated with peer relationships, such as lower peer influence for punctual students.

Table 6

Scale	Truant (n = 100)		Punctual (n = 100)				95%CI		
	M	SD	M	SD	t(df)	p	LL	UL	Cohen's d
Extraver	15.31	3.33	13.72	3.05	3.52 (196)	.00	.70	2.48	0.49
Neurot	9.20	3.88	9.79	3.86	1.07 (197)	.28	-1.67	.49	
Psychot	6.90	2.32	4.34	2.57	7.37 (196)	.00	1.87	3.24	1.04
Lie	13.99	3.60	3.20	14.20	.43 (194)	.11	-1.17	.75	

Mean wise differences, Standard Deviation of Truant and Punctual Students on EPQ and IPF (N = 200)

Note. Extraver = Extraversion; Neurot = Neuroticism; Psychot = Psychoticism

In table 6, there is a significant mean difference between truant and punctual students in the traits of extraversion and psychoticism. The results show that truant students exhibit higher levels of extraversion and psychotic traits as compared to punctual students. Students exhibit higher levels of extraversion and psychoticism than punctual students.

Table 7

Simple Logistic Regression Analyses for IPF, Extraversion, and Psychoticism as Predictors of School Truancy for truant and punctual students (N = 200)

Predictor	B	S.E.	WALD	EXP B	p	95% CI	
						LL	UL
Constant	.00	.14	.00	1.0	1.00		
RP	-.11	.04	7.27	.88	.00	.97	.77
Extraversion	-.13	.08	5.27	.59	.02	.96	.81
Psychoticism	-.51	.05	38.78	.90	.00	1.07	.77

Note. RP = Relationship with peers; B = unstandardised regression coefficient; SE = standardised error estimate of the regression coefficient. Wald is the test of significance, distributed as the chi square with degree of freedom.

In table 7, The study's results of the simple logistic regression analysis reveal that peer influence, precisely through the Relationship with Peers subset of the IPF that significantly predicts school truancy. The results also reveal that peer relationships increase the likelihood of school truancy. Additionally, higher levels of both Psychoticism and Extraversion are further significant predictors of school truancy, which is demonstrating that students with these personality traits are more disposed to involve in truant behavior. These results highlight the role of peer influence and specific personality traits in triggering truanc behavior in aadolescents.

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the psychometric properties of the Index of Peer Influence scale in Pakistani truant students and evaluate the linkage between personality traits and peer influence in school-going punctual and truant students. Moreover, it explored differences in peer influence and personality traits between true and punctual samples.

The present study aimed to evaluate and develop the psychometric properties of the IPF in truant sample. For this purpose, EFA was used to explore the underlying structure of IPF and

establish its construct validity for truant students. The results identified two distinct factors, including relationship with peers and peer influence for drug use, for the total samples. These results confirmed the complex nature of peer influence for truant students, which is reflecting both the multidimensional nature of peer dynamics and their different effect on truant behavior. The study's results show a clear difference between the two factors, which improves the scale's usefulness for examining peer influence among school students. This study's results reveal that it is a reliable and valid scale to assess peer influence in Pakistani students.

This study also hypothesised and proposed a positive association between peer influence and the personality traits of neuroticism, extraversion, and psychoticism, which is supported in the present study. This study's results reveal there is a significant positive association between extraversion traits of personality and peer relationships in truant and punctual students. The findings recommend that those individuals who had extravert traits experience higher peer influence (Aqeel & Rehna, 2020; Gonzálvez et al., 2018; Kearney, 2008, 2022; Osborne et al., 2024; Rogers et al., 2024; Tahira & Jami, 2021; Villadsen et al., 2024). Prior studies supports with this results which revealed that extraverts indiviuals are more successful in developing peer relationships. However, Neuroticism was significant positively linked to peer influence related to drug use in Pakistani truant students. it recomands that those students who had Neuroticism triats are more vulnerable to involving in substance use under peer pressure. In the contrast, Neuroticism traits was negatively associated with positive peer influence For punctual students, which is recomanding that highly neurotic students are less probable to be triggered by positive peer relationships (Aqeel et al., 2020; Aqeel & Akhtar, 2017; Bhatti et al., 2023; Maynard et al., 2017; Sarfraz et al., 2021). Moreover, Psychoticism traits was negatively linked to positive peer influence in truants sample, which is demonstrating that individuals who have Psychoticism are less affected by positive peer relationships(Rasasingham, 2015; Tolin et al., 2009).

Moreover, this study hypothesised that truant students would exhibit higher levels of extraversion, psychoticism, and neuroticism traits in comparison to punctual students, which was partially supported in the present study . Truant students had more extraversion and psychoticism traits, which is supported by previous studies demonstrating that extravert traits are more inclined to risky behaviour, including school truancy, because of their sensation-seeking haracteristics (Aqeel & Rehna, 2020; Gonzálvez et al., 2018; Kearney, 2008, 2022; Osborne et al., 2024; Rogers et al., 2024; Tahira & Jami, 2021; Villadsen et al., 2024). Previous studies also reported that psychotic traits are associated with mental health issues like antisocial behaviour, and it was also found more in truants, which is confirming its role in delinquent behaviour(Osborne et al., 2024). However, there are found non-significant differences for the neuroticism trait that are possibly because of the peer acceptance that truants students may face, which can improve their self-esteem and mitigate and control neurotic tendencies in school students(Rogers et al., 2024).

Additionally, this study also proposes that peer influence and personality traits are considered crucial precursors of school truancy, which was confirmed. Logistic regression analysis revealed that greater peer influence involvement, mostly in social relationships, anticipated higher truancy rates in school students. The results also supported that psychoticism and extraversion were also significant predictors of school truancy, with extraverted school students more probable to be involved in peer-driven social activities that distract from school(Gul et al., 2022; Peters & Aqeel, 2020; Shuja et al., 2020, 2022). In contrast, those students who are high in psychotic traits are more inclined to delinquent and antisocial behavior. Peer pressure, particularly from groups, was highlighted as a significant factor in school truancy, as adolescents frequently prioritise peer

acceptance, which leads them to bunk their school together(Gul et al., 2022; Peters & Aqeel, 2020; Shuja et al., 2020, 2022).

Conclusion

This study suggested that the role of personality traits and peer influence were more crucial factors to mitigate and enhance school truancy in the Pakistani context.This study's findings demonstrated that truant students exhibit higher levels of psychoticism and extraversion personality traits, along with a higher prevalence of negative peer influence as compared to punctual students. EFA identified two novel factors within the Index of Peer Influence scale, including relationships with peers and peer influence for drug use for truant students. These results revealed the Index of Peer Influence scale was reliable and a valid scale for the true student sample. These results contribute valuable insights into the complex interplay of social dynamics and personality of truancy, which is offering actionable guidance for developing indigenous interventions aimed at reducing and improving the prevalence of school truancy and its associated risk factors.

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