

Understanding and Addressing Social Stigma Against Children with Intellectual Disabilities: Impact, Causes, and Strategies for Inclusion

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Abstract

Social stigma against children with intellectual barriers is still a serious problem at various levels of society. Intellectual barriers are often seen as absolute weaknesses, leading to discrimination, social rejection, and limited access to education and an inclusive environment. This research aims to identify the forms of stigma that arise, the factors that influence them, and their impact on the psychosocial development of children and their families. The method used is a literature study with a qualitative approach. The results of the study show that stigma arises from a lack of understanding, cultural influences, and deeply rooted negative stereotypes. This stigma not only hinders children's growth and development, but also reduces parents' confidence in accompanying their children. Therefore, a comprehensive strategy is needed that includes public education, the implementation of inclusive policies, and the empowerment of families and schools in creating an environment that accepts and supports children with intellectual disabilities. Efforts to eliminate stigma are the first step towards a more just, inclusive, and humane society for children with intellectual barriers.

Keywords: *Stigma, Intellectual Disabilities, Social Stigma, Impact, Causes, Strategies*

Manuscript History

Received: 24 July 2025

Revised: 10 September 2025

Accepted: 28 November 2025

How to cite:

Fadillah, A. N., Rahmah, R. S., Putri, N. A., Syafei, S., Putri, N. A., Maulidina, C. A & Taboer, M. A. (2025). *Understanding And Addressing Social Stigma Against Children With Intellectual Disabilities: Impact, Causes, And Strategies For Inclusion*. International Disability Innovation Journal, 1(2), 34-45.

INTRODUCTION

Social stigma occurs across various community settings and is a major obstacle to social inclusion. In general, social stigma is a process in which a particular individual or group is negatively labeled, stigmatized, and discriminated against because of differences considered deviant from prevailing social norms. According to Erving Goffman (1963), stigma is an attribute that stigmatizes a person, rendering them no longer considered "normal" by the surrounding society. According to Scheid & Brown (2010), stigma is a "sign" or social label that refers to individuals and negative judgments, often leading to exclusion or discrimination. This process not only involves negative views but can also lead to social exclusion. Link and Phelan (2001) add that stigma is a complex social process encompassing labeling, stereotyping, segregation, status degradation, and discrimination, all of which are influenced by broader social forces.

Society's negative view of children with intellectual barriers is not only limited to perception, but is also manifested in the form of discriminatory actions. These children are often labeled "bad boys", "stupid", or even "cursed". In fact, this stigma leads to social exclusion within the family, at school, and in the community. In addition, families of children with intellectual disabilities also feel the impact of stigma, such as psychological pressure, shame, and social isolation. This condition diminishes the quality of life for children and their families and impairs optimal child development.

The impact of social stigma on children with intellectual barriers is significant and complex. Psychologically, stigma can lower a child's self-confidence, trigger feelings of worthlessness, and increase the risk of mental disorders such as depression and anxiety. Socially, stigma causes these children to experience exclusion from various social activities, education, and opportunities to interact with peers. This not only limits their potential to thrive but also reinforces cycles of inequality and neglect. Research shows that children with intellectual disabilities experience restrictions on their fundamental rights, such as the right to go to school, play, and participate in society.

Children with intellectual barriers often face various stigmas in society, including neglect and unilateral labeling. This can be improved by ensuring equitable access to education for children with intellectual disabilities to develop their potential, including their communication skills, and by fostering relationships for socialization.

This research shows that many stigmas persist in school, family, and community settings, leading to the non-fulfillment of rights to socialize and to access employment, housing, health services, and social care. This stigma can also limit movement and have a psychological effect that will hinder the development of children's potential with intellectual barriers.

This research was conducted to disseminate information to the public about the social influence and stigma that develop around children with intellectual disabilities in society, which remain neglected, as in Indonesia and in developed countries such as Europe. It is hoped that this research will improve public perceptions of children with intellectual barriers, recognizing that they have the right to voice, socialize, develop, and participate in community life. This can be achieved by supporting and protecting their existence and rights, as well as by creating an inclusive, comfortable, and safe environment in which children can develop their abilities.

METHOD

The method we use is the literature review. According to Neuman (2014), a literature review is a systematic method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing previous research to build a deep and credible understanding of a topic. This aligns with the opinion of Jansen-van Vuuren & Aldersey (2020), who emphasized the importance of a *literature review* in exploring various approaches, especially those related to stigma and inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities. In addition, Scior et al. (2020) highlight that literature reviews enable researchers to assess the effectiveness of various global initiatives in reducing stigma and increasing social inclusion for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Based on the results of a study by three experts, we conclude that the literature review method is a research approach that involves the collection and analysis of relevant sources to build a deep understanding. We start this method with the following steps:

1. Identify topics

The initial stage of our literature review is to determine the focus of the research. In *this literature review*, our primary focus is on social stigma and its impact on children with intellectual disabilities. The identification of these topics is based on academic relevance and research urgency, enabling a more targeted exploration of the literature.

2. Literature selection

Once the topic was determined, we collected a wide range of literature related to the object of study. The selection is based on criteria such as the source's credibility, the method employed, and its relevance to the purpose of *our literature review*.

3. Screening of relevant sources

The collected literature is then screened to ensure its validity and relevance. Screening is conducted through methodological and substantive evaluation to select data that make a significant contribution to our *literature review*.

4. Journal analysis

We then critically analyze the literature data, filtered to identify patterns or phenomena related to social stigma against children with intellectual disabilities. This stage involves comparing previous studies to gain in-depth, diverse perspectives.

5. Compiling an outline of conclusions

We compile conclusions by considering various academic approaches that have been studied. This process aims to summarize key findings from previous studies to build a more systematic, evidence-based knowledge base.

6. Matching between the results of the analysis and the real situation

To enhance the validity and relevance of the research, we will compare the findings from the literature review with real-world conditions in the community. The evaluation of field data aims to assess the consistency between theoretical results and observed phenomena.

The literature data we obtain from a variety of sources, such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and campus academic sites. We grouped the search results and selected ten journals and articles published in the last five years (2020–2025), consisting of three national journals and seven international journals, using the keywords "Social stigma of intellectual disabilities", "*Social stigma of children with intellectual disabilities*", and "*Stigmatising individuals with intellectual disabilities*". In this way, we can identify articles and journals that discuss these issues, as well as the cases that underlie these publications, thereby broadening and diversifying the scope of our discussions. The journals were selected through in-depth research into public perceptions and children's subjective experiences of their surroundings. Understanding the perceptions of the surrounding community helps researchers identify which aspects need further exploration, especially those related to methods. Therefore, this method aims to describe systematically, factually, and accurately the facts that occur around the social stigma of children with intellectual disabilities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Data analysis matrix in articles used in the literature review

No	Author, Year, Title	Method	Result
1	Katrina Scior, Aseel Hamid, Richard Hastings, Shirli Werner, Catherine Belton, Adebisi Laniyan, Maya Patel, Maria Kett 2020, <i>Intellectual disability stigma and initiatives to challenge it and promote inclusion around the globe</i>	Descriptive qualitative	This research shows that stigma against people with intellectual disabilities is still a major challenge around the world, both in developed and developing countries. Although many people express support for social inclusion, the reality is that they still treat individuals discriminatory. Initiatives to reduce stigma, such as public awareness campaigns and education programs, have been implemented, but they have been unevenly distributed, especially in countries with limited resources. The study concludes that to truly challenge stigma and encourage inclusion, a consistent, data-driven cross-sector approach is needed, as well as direct empowerment of people with disabilities and their families.

2	<p>Hannah A. Pelleboer-Gunnink., Wietske M. W. J. Van Oorsouw, Jaap van Weeghel and Petri J. C. M. Embregts 2021.</p> <p><i>Stigma research in the field of intellectual disabilities: a scoping review on the perspective of care providers</i></p>	Quantitative	<p>The journal shows that care providers show high variability in interpreting clients with ID who have challenging behaviors, without holding a collective view or stereotype. While there have been positive findings regarding non-stereotypical perceptions in the UK, other studies have shown the existence of stereotypical views, such as the one in the Leros sanctuary in Greece, where people with ID are viewed negatively. In addition, stereotypes also arise based on other social identities, such as personality disorders, which often distract from the client's ID. Some staff members also exhibit stereotypical attitudes toward elderly patients with ID, which can limit their opportunities. Studies on public stigma are rare and focus more on the cognitive aspects of stigma, with evidence of stereotyped and non-stereotypical views among care providers. (Pelleboer-Gunnink et al., 2021)</p>
3	<p>S Zamorano, AB Santos-Olmo, Sánchez-Iglesias, Muñoz-Lara, M Muñoz 2024,</p> <p><i>The stigma of intellectual disability in Spain: a nationally representative survey</i></p>	Quantitative descriptive <i>cross-sectional</i>	<p>This journal shows that the social stigma experienced by people with intellectual disabilities is in the form of difficulty in accessing jobs, housing (housing), health services and social care. This social stigma even reduces movement and opportunities to socialize. The level of stigma generated in Spain is moderate-low where people with intellectual disabilities will face conditions that people will maintain social distancing and do not want to get acquainted, but people who have relationships with people with intellectual disabilities will discuss with acquaintances who are experiencing similar things. (Zamorano et al., 2024)</p>
4	<p>Vyda Mamley Hervie 2023, <i>Social inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in Accra, Ghana: Views of parents/guardians and teachers</i></p>	Qualitative Descriptive and purposive sampling methods	<p>This journal shows that children with intellectual disabilities in Accra, Ghana experience a state of lack of trust from society, neglect by parents and negative stigmas and unilateral labeling against them, but this situation can be corrected by special education that benefits children with intellectual disabilities to be able to communicate, acquire skills</p>

			and build social relationships. (Hervie, 2023)
5	Siti Azizah, Zulfa Fahmy, Irma Masfia 2024. <i>The impact of social stigma and adaptation strategies on adolescents with intellectual disabilities at Kinasih Inclusive Disability House</i>	Qualitative	This journal discusses how adolescents with intellectual barriers face social stigma that negatively impacts their mental health and social well-being, such as the emergence of inferiority and isolation. Nonetheless, they developed a variety of adaptation strategies, such as seeking social support and building confidence. The Kinasih Inclusion Disability House has a crucial role in providing support and training related to adaptation strategies for these adolescents. The study emphasizes that social support from family, peers, and professionals is essential in helping them overcome stigma and improve self-esteem and well-being. Overall, the journal highlights that while social stigma is a major challenge, appropriate adaptation strategies and adequate social support can help adolescents with intellectual barriers cope with these problems. (Ma'rufatus Tsaniyah et al., n.d.)
6	Siregar, D., Siringo Ringo, E. G., Ramadani, F., Butarbutar, F. F. N., Hutasoit, F. Y. N., Silalahi, M., Puteri, A., & Tansliova, L. 2025, Negative Stereotype Analysis: The Challenges of Children with Special Needs in School	Qualitative	This journal discusses how adolescents with intellectual barriers face social stigma that negatively impacts their mental health and social well-being, such as the emergence of inferiority and isolation. Nonetheless, they developed a variety of adaptation strategies, such as seeking social support and building confidence. The Kinasih Inclusion Disability House has a crucial role in providing support and training related to adaptation strategies for these adolescents. The study emphasizes that social support from family, peers, and professionals is essential in helping them overcome stigma and improve self-esteem and well-being. Overall, the journal highlights that while social stigma is a major challenge, appropriate adaptation strategies and adequate social support can help adolescents with intellectual barriers cope with these problems. (Ma'rufatus Tsaniyah et al., n.d.)

7	<p>Katrina Scior, Rebecca Cooper, Kristina Fenn, Laurie Poole, Sophie Colman, Afia Ali, Sandra Baum, Jason Crabtree, Sophie Doswell, Andrew Jahoda, Richard Hastings, Lisa Richardson 2022. <i>Standing up for Myself' (STORM): Development and qualitative evaluation of a psychosocial group intervention designed to increase the capacity of people with intellectual disabilities to manage and resist stigma.</i></p>	Qualitative, psychosocial group intervention methods	<p>The result of the study is that this study takes a public health approach in viewing stigma as a problem that all individuals with intellectual disabilities may have to face at various points in their lives. A theoretically and strategically driven decision to intervene in pre-existing groups of people with intellectual disabilities. Participants in the intervention group were affected by stigma to different levels and their ability to manage and fight stigma varied. It can be said that the intervention is targeted at individuals who show negative responses to their stigma status, such as lower self-esteem and/or psychological distress. (Scior et al., 2022)</p>
8	<p>Joanne Mampaso Desbrow, Álvaro Moraleda Ruano, Diego Galán-Casado & Diana Ruiz-Vicente 2024. <i>Stigmatising young people with intellectual disability: Perceptions of the main stakeholders</i></p>	Quantitative	<p>The results of the study are that many people have a positive opinion in assessing individuals with intellectual disabilities. This opinion is supported by Yazbeck's opinion, this is because many people already know about individuals with intellectual disabilities, such as providing special and proper treatment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. There are also special programs that are indirectly designed to reduce the stigma of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Compared to people who do not have this knowledge, they can only think negatively in judging individuals with intellectual disabilities. (Mampaso Desbrow et al., 2024)</p>
9	<p>Dennis Feaster, Aaron Franzen 2021. <i>From stigma to acceptance: Intellectual and developmental disabilities in central China</i></p>	Qualitative, exploratory	<p>This journal discusses disability through the fact that it is seen that many of the disabilities come from homeless families or odd workers. Intellectual and developmental disabilities often have to be hidden from society, as well as barriers in communication services related to social stigma and discrimination in aspects of care, protection, economic security, support, and social participation. Children with</p>

			intellectual disabilities often experience social exclusion and vulnerability, as well as the challenges faced, lack of support from family, community, limited resources, information and the impact of mental health on their parents. As parents have a role for their children in voicing the right for their children's future in society, parents' perceptions of their children will change over time, and children can have decent access, especially in school access and understanding of disabilities can compete in a wider culture. (Feaster & Franzen, 2021)
10	Eka Mayang Sari, Opi Andriani 2024. Community Stigma Against Children with Special Needs in Public Schools	Qualitative	The results of the research from the article show that the stigma of society towards children with special needs in public schools is relatively good as according to the results of the interview that the community has sufficiently understood how the characteristics of children with special needs in the learning process and interacting. The learning process of children with special needs is the same as children in general, namely preparing lesson plans as learning planning, using strategies, methods and various media as learning implementation, and learning evaluation. It's just that the learning process carried out is adaptive, meaning that the learning process adjusts to the circumstances of the students themselves. Children with special needs (ABK) generally have obstacles and difficulties in communicating verbally with others (Eka Mayang Sari & Opi Andriani, 2024)

After analyzing the results of the ten journals above, various views were found on social stigma and its influence on children with intellectual barriers, both in social services, the community environment, the role of the family, and education. However, in the discussion, there is still a relationship between one journal and another, especially in showing the conditions and impacts experienced by children with intellectual barriers to facing stigmas that develop in society. The second and third journals highlight the negative views that have developed on social services for children with intellectual disabilities.

In the second journal, it is shown that the negative stigma that occurs in Greece arises because of the view of the social identity of children with intellectual barriers, this leads to a lack of

appropriate services and discriminatory behavior, even in this journal it is stated that the social services provided appear to be very inequality with individuals without intellectual barriers, a similar situation also occurs in Spain. The third journal shows that children with intellectual disabilities have difficulty accessing various social services, health services, job vacancies, and even housing. The negative stigma that develops in Spain shows that there is a social distance between people with intellectual disabilities and their social environment, which affects the social services provided for children with intellectual disabilities. These two journals show the same results, even though they occur in two countries with different cultures; it turns out that the negative stigma they face causes the non-fulfillment of the social rights of children with intellectual disabilities.

In the fourth and ninth journals, the issues highlighted were in the form of the role of the family that affects the development of stigma, as well as the impact it has on children with intellectual disabilities. In the fourth journal, it was stated that children with intellectual disabilities in Accra, Ghana, experienced parental neglect and unilateral labeling of their condition, which had an impact in the form of inferiority, lack of confidence in public, and feelings of not being considered. A similar thing also happens in China, in the ninth journal it is stated that children with intellectual disabilities must experience events in the form of rejection in the family, often parents find it difficult to accept the fact that their child experiences different conditions this is due to various factors ranging from lack of understanding and awareness followed by the fact that many of these disabilities come from underprivileged families which further aggravates the condition of rejection and views negative developments in society. These two journals show that the role and acceptance of parents and the family environment have a significant influence on the development of negative views in society regarding children with intellectual disabilities.

The aspect of mental health and social welfare of children with intellectual barriers is discussed in the fifth and seventh journals, which explain the influence of stigma or negative views on the decline in mental health and social welfare of children with intellectual barriers. In the fifth journal, it was stated that children with intellectual barriers in Indonesia experienced a decline in mental health and social welfare in the form of low self-esteem, self-isolation, lack of confidence, loss of socialization opportunities due to stigma, and unilateral labeling that occurred in the community. Similar things also happened in the UK. In the seventh journal, it was stated that children with intellectual disabilities in the UK experience psychological distress as a result of the response to the negative stigma that develops in society regarding the conditions experienced by them. These two journals show that negative stigma also affects the mental health and well-being of children with intellectual disabilities, which, if left unchecked, will worsen the conditions experienced by children with intellectual disabilities.

In the aspect of the struggle to create an inclusive environment, the first and ninth journals discuss social stigma which is one of the drivers of this struggle, the fact that there are still many children with intellectual barriers who receive discriminatory treatment from various aspects of their environment that come from negative stigma, this reinforces the fact that an inclusive environment is still not available to children with intellectual barriers. In the first journal, this struggle began with a data-based cross-sector approach, then conducted a public campaign in the form of disseminating information about children with intellectual disabilities and assistance that can be provided from the community to children with intellectual disabilities, then the government also seeks to improve education systems and programs that are more inclusive and in accordance with the needs of children, education is believed to be able to increase public perception of children with intellectual disabilities that they can also have a role, empowered and valuable in the community, and the last is the empowerment of families who have children with intellectual disabilities, this empowerment is believed to improve the social and economic status of the family in order to provide better services to the special needs of children, this is strengthened by the results shown in the ninth journal that

empowered parents are able to play a role to fight for children's rights with intellectual barriers, change perceptions and spread understanding to the community.

Almost all journals show results that the stigma that develops in society in various parts of the world still shows negative stigmas in the form of exclusion, exploitation, discriminatory treatment, and unilateral labeling, but the eighth and tenth journals show inversely proportional results that there is a development from society regarding the understanding of children with intellectual barriers. The eighth journal shows that there has been a positive development and change in stigma regarding children with intellectual disabilities in Spain, such as the number of people who already know children with intellectual disabilities, the number of people who understand how to handle and provide appropriate special treatment, and the availability of special programs that support the self-development of children with intellectual disabilities. The same thing is also shown in Indonesia. In the tenth journal, the school environment in Indonesia has experienced development and changes in a more positive direction regarding the handling of children with intellectual barriers. Many schools recognize the special needs of children and provide appropriate learning programs that enhance children's abilities and self-development, thereby slowly reducing negative stigma and fostering positive change.

Research from various journals strengthens the finding that stigma not only has an impact on children with intellectual barriers but also spreads to various aspects, such as family aspects, social environment, education, and community welfare.

Stigma is a major cause of discrimination and exclusion that can affect an individual's self-esteem, disrupt family relationships, and limit their ability to socialize. Stigma can be in the form of social rejection, physical violence, and denial of services (Sulistiadi et al., 2020). Stigma is the negative labeling of a person or group, which can adversely affect the individual's mental health. Stigma can lead to discrimination and prevent individuals from pursuing their life goals, such as securing employment and living independently and safely (Hartini et al., 2018). Stigma is a phenomenon that occurs when a person is labeled, stereotyped, separated, and discriminated against (Scheid & Brown, In Primary, 2020). Social stigma is a situation in which a group rejects a person because they are perceived as violating prevailing norms. Social stigma can lead to the exclusion of individuals or groups. Negative traits that persist in a person's personality due to environmental influences. Another definition of stigma is the attempt to label a group as less deserving of respect than others (Sane, in Tristana, 2017). According to Goffman (Dhairya and Herawati 2019), this refers to all physical and social attributes associated with a person's body that can diminish their social identity, leading to rejection. The stigma is not given without cause, but rather because a person is considered different and unnatural.

Ideally, society should view children with intellectual barriers as individuals who have the right to develop, empower, have potential and can play a role in society, thus there needs to be education provided to the community to be able to change the wrong perception of children with intellectual barriers that they are not helpless, ignorant, and pitiful individuals but individuals who also have the same right to develop and be empowered by fulfillment of their rights in the aspects of education, employment, health, and the social environment. The role of the family in this case is to enable children with intellectual barriers to develop properly and to play an active role in the community, as an effort to change the perceptions and stigmas that develop in society toward children with intellectual barriers. Schools also play a role in providing educational services that can optimally develop children's potential, thereby making them more readily accepted in society. In reality, children with intellectual disabilities are individuals who can develop, unlike unilateral labeling of their potential and abilities. The government should also fulfill its obligation to create an inclusive environment that ensures access to facilities and rights for children with intellectual disabilities across various domains.

However, the facts on the ground show different results; the ideal environment and the roles that support the change in stigma for children with intellectual barriers are not met. Children with intellectual disabilities still often experience discriminatory treatment, exclusion, neglect, and various other negative stereotypes. This is exacerbated by the lack of public knowledge about children with intellectual disabilities, which continues to encourage misunderstandings and unilateral labeling of children with intellectual disabilities. The role of the family that should be the basis for the change in stigma can actually be one of the inhibiting factors; the family is often still shackled by fear and rejection of the condition experienced by the child, which gives rise to behaviors such as withdrawing children from the social environment, neglect, and isolation. Schools, which also have an important role until now, are still difficult to access for children with intellectual barriers, and the lack of educators and the lack of special and inclusive schools continue to exacerbate the condition and development of negative stigma in society.

To overcome this challenge, strategic steps must be taken that involve multiple parties. This effort can be started by educating the public about children with intellectual disabilities. This education can be done by implementing strategies such as social campaigns directly through seminars, counseling, and socialization, or campaigns by utilizing social media, such as increasing news about the achievements of children with intellectual disabilities on various platforms, short videos introducing "who they are" on TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and various other social media. In this campaign, there needs to be a consistent attitude to continue disseminating information to the public, so that, over time, the negative stigma can be reduced as people increasingly know and understand children with intellectual barriers. This campaign can also be implemented through partnerships with various stakeholders, such as parents, families, educators, and the government. Many content creators have tried to introduce children with intellectual barriers to parents, families, educators, and the government. Although responses to this content are not always positive, it can slowly shift the negative stigmas that develop in society. All parties need to work together to continue striving to create an inclusive environment and gradually reduce negative stigma.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review, it can be concluded that social stigma against children with intellectual barriers is still the biggest obstacle in realizing an inclusive and fair environment. The stigma manifests in various forms, ranging from negative labeling, exclusion, and neglect of fundamental rights to discrimination in education, socialization, and public services. The results of literature reviews from various journals show that although cultural and regional backgrounds are different, the form and impact of social stigma on children with intellectual barriers tend to be similar, both psychologically, socially, and structurally.

However, there is still hope that can be built through collaboration from various parties. In an effort to reduce this stigma, the research identified various strategies that emphasize the importance of sustainable public education through social campaigns, both directly (e.g., seminars and counseling) and through digital media (e.g., educational videos on social media). In addition, family support is an important factor in increasing children's confidence and fighting negative labeling. Schools need to build an adaptive and inclusive learning system. At the same time, the government must play an active role in providing facilities, strengthening policies, and ensuring the fulfillment of children with intellectual disabilities' basic rights. Collaboration among all parties is an important foundation for creating an environment that is friendly, supportive, and free of social stigma.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Alyana Nur Fadillah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing and Finalization; Ridyah Syifani Rahmah: Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing and Validation; Nurlaila Arifa Putri: Formal Analysis,

Resources, Writing ; Nafisa Amelia Putri: Formal Analysis, Resources and Data Curation; Syaima Syafei: Resources, Formal Analysis, Data Curation.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare no known financial conflicts of interest or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

DECLARATION OF ETHICS

The authors declare that the research and writing of this manuscript adhere to ethical standards of research and publication, in accordance with scientific principles, and are free from plagiarism.

DECLARATION OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The authors declare that Generative Artificial Intelligence and other assistive technologies were not excessively utilized in the research and writing processes of this manuscript.

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