

RESEARCH ON RESIDENTS' INTENTION TO SETTLE AND THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF GREEN POLICY LEADERSHIP

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Abstract:

This research constitutes a comprehensive exploration aimed at disentangling the intricate web of relationships between citizens' interest and their proclivity to engage with policies instituted by local governments, and the consequential impact on their intent to settle in a specific geographical area. Employing a robust quantitative analysis, the authors embarked on a mission to decipher the multifaceted interplay between citizens' attitudes, local policies, and their desire to establish roots in a particular locale. To facilitate this exploration, the authors meticulously devised a sophisticated model, wherein "welfare and health promotion" and "social participation and exchange" emerged as the primary latent factors, while "green policy leadership" took center stage as the mediating force in the analytical framework. The research design involved a meticulous examination of the paths leading to citizens' "settlement intention". Drawing insights from the outcomes of an extensive intention survey, the authors meticulously collected and cleaned a rich dataset sourced from citizen surveys conducted in City A, strategically nestled in the heart of Japan's Honshu island. This dataset, after a stringent filtering process, crystallised into a substantial sample size of 466 responses. The study's outcomes reveal a nuanced narrative regarding the relationship between social participation and exchange policies and citizens' intent to settle. Intriguingly, the findings suggest that these policies, when considered in isolation, may not exert a direct influence on citizens' proclivity to settle in a municipality. However, their potency becomes evident when channeled through the lens of green policy leadership. This signifies the importance of local governments adopting a holistic approach that not only emphasises individual policies but also recognises the synergistic impact achieved through the integration of green policy leadership. Furthermore, the research extends beyond the conventional examination of policies by delving into the unexplored realms of proactive appeals and communication methods employed by local governments. Going beyond the traditional purview of green policy, the study illuminates the critical role played by effective communication strategies. It suggests that a proactive approach in communicating policies, coupled with a leadership stance that accentuates green policies, serves as a catalyst for aligning local residents' instructions with municipal policies. This dynamic interplay fosters a positive environment that, in turn, augments citizens' willingness to settle in the area.

Keywords: local government; residents' intention to settle down; health promotion policy; green policy leadership; SEM

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1. Introduction

According to the study “Population Projections for Japan” (National Institute of Population and Social Security, 2018), Japan’s population, which was 128 million in 2010, is expected to keep declining and reach 107 million by 2040. “The White Paper on Land, Infrastructure and Transport” (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, 2019) states that Japan is at a major turning point and advocates society’s restructuring in view of the declining population, an ageing society with fewer children, new values and attractions. However, the problems and issues to be addressed are so all-encompassing that local governments are at a loss in deciding which measures to prioritise and tackle. They are particularly concerned about the need to ensure stability in their citizens’ lives in the wake of the recent COVID-19 pandemic as well as transparency, rationality and timeliness of policy decisions.

Aiming to examine a hypothetical study model for prioritising policy measures in an ageing society and present material for discussion, this study developed a quantitative test of the mediating effects of factors and government leadership in stimulating citizens’ desire to settle in local cities, which is a current theme. Therefore, we set welfare and health promotion, citizen participation and connectivity as antecedent elements and focused on the mediating effect of a government’s green policy leadership as the factor that mediates these elements.

When policymakers attempt to implement specific measures, it is crucial to consider how certain policies or values may influence policy objectives through various pathways. This perspective is essential in policy planning, particularly when policymakers face fiscal constraints, multiple policy options and overall strategic planning. It is significant to quantitatively identify the elements that have mediating effects on the targeted goal, in this case, stimulating residents’ willingness to settle.

For instance, if the leadership in urban green space or environmental policies has an impact on citizens’ settlement intentions, it is pertinent to examine how other significant policy options may be amplified by government leadership to effectively influence residents’ willingness to settle.

Therefore, this study aimed to quantitatively examine the mediating effects of leadership in green policies, which have been highlighted in the mentioned academic discourse.

2. Literature review

2.1. The significance of promoting resident settlement

In contemporary urban planning and policymaking, the promotion of resident settlement has emerged as a crucial and multifaceted challenge. This issue has garnered significant attention because of its far-reaching implications for sustainable development, social cohesion and economic growth. By encouraging stable and committed communities, fostering a sense of belonging and ensuring a diverse and engaged citizenry, the promotion of resident settlement contributes to the creation of resilient and thriving urban environments (Campos et al., 2022).

Resident settlement plays a vital role in driving local economic development and urban vibrancy. A stable and growing population ensures sustained demand for goods, services and housing, thereby attracting investments and promoting entrepreneurship (Florida, 2002). Engaged residents who actively participate in the local economy contribute to increased consumer spending, job creation and a thriving business environment (Rosen & Painter, 2019; Wheeler, 2012).

2.2. Welfare and health promotion

Resident settlement is intricately linked to the well-being and quality of individuals’ lives (Kearns & Collins, 2012; Tang et al., 2023). In settled communities, residents build social networks and support systems that positively impact mental and physical health (Bos et al., 2016; Wood et al., 2022). Access to essential services, recreational facilities and green spaces within close proximity enhances residents’ overall satisfaction with their living environment (Moser & Ratiu, 2019; Zhang et al., 2022).

Promoting resident settlement is a fundamental task in urban planning and policymaking because of its wide-ranging impact on social cohesion, economic development, sustainable planning and overall well-being. By drawing upon these interdisciplinary insights, policymakers can develop targeted interventions and strategies to foster a strong sense of community and enhance the liveability and resilience of urban areas. The synthesis of scholarly research and empirical evidence highlights the significance of prioritising resident settlement in the pursuit of urban prosperity and societal flourishing.

2.3. Citizens' participation and connectedness

A well-settled and interconnected community fosters social cohesion, whereby individuals develop a sense of belonging and solidarity (Putnam, 2000). This social cohesion creates a supportive environment in which residents are likely to engage in community activities, collaborate on local initiatives and address common challenges together (Bolin & Kurtz, 2018).

Embracing a strong sense of social connectedness and fostering meaningful relationships within society can significantly contribute to individuals' subjective well-being and overall health. This concept, often referred to as 'social capital', underscores the importance of interconnectedness with others in our communities.

Studies have consistently shown that individuals embedded in robust social networks tend to experience high levels of happiness and report good physical and mental health (Angelis & Pensini, 2023). Social support from friends, family and colleagues can act as a buffer against stress and adversity, thereby promoting emotional resilience. Moreover, a sense of belonging and social cohesion within a community can enhance feelings of security and trust, thereby creating a supportive environment (Arslan et al., 2022).

Engaging in activities that promote social interaction and community involvement, such as volunteering or participating in group activities, can help individuals build and strengthen their social capital. By doing so, people not only enrich their own lives but also contribute to the collective well-being of their society, creating a virtuous cycle of social connectedness and happiness (Helliwell et al., 2023).

2.4. Green policy leadership

Examining the impact of sustainable urban planning on the environment is a crucial task for local governments today (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022). Promoting resident settlement aligns with the principles of sustainable urban planning and mitigates urban sprawl and environmental degradation (Zhang et al., 2023). By concentrating on development within existing urban areas, resources such as energy, water and transportation infrastructure can be used efficiently (Litman, 2019). Compact and walkable neighbourhoods encourage sustainable transportation choices and reduce the residents' carbon footprint (Tribby et al., 2017). Moreover, leading so-called green policies constitutes a significant leadership role for local governments (Azhar & Yang, 2022).

The green policies of local governments refer to the policies and initiatives adopted to promote environmental protection and sustainable development in the region. This includes a wide range of environmentally conscious measures, such as preservation of natural resources and ecosystems, introduction of renewable energy, waste reduction and promotion of recycling. By advancing green policies, local governments aim to reduce the environmental burden on the region and positively impact their residents' lives and health. In addition, these policies are recognised as crucial contributions to sustainable development and climate-change mitigation.

Moreover, local governments' leadership in implementing green policies has become a significant factor in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, a responsibility shared by all global citizens. The announcement, implementation and evaluation of the effectiveness of these policies are all critical aspects that need to be addressed as a part of the comprehensive policy evaluation process (Fujita, 2022). Through the active leadership of local governments in green policy implementation, communities can move closer to achieving sustainability goals and creating an environmentally friendly and resilient society (Suzuki, 2021; Tanaka, 2020).

2.5. Hypotheses and conceptual models

In the context of local government policy, we should follow Wright's argument that a pragmatic and scientific approach is required when considering what policy should be (Wright, 2011). There is a need to identify the most important policy agendas to maintain the population, draw in new residents with an attractive municipal administration and maintain the sustainable development of civil society.

With the population ageing, welfare and health promotion are essential elements (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2020). Additionally, citizens' participation in society and interaction with people is a commitment to the municipal government. These two latent variables should lead to a sense of settlement (Oe & Yamaoka, 2021).

Furthermore, this study hypothesised that preservation of natural wealth, that is green policy leadership, may have a mediating effect. The authors devised a conceptual model, shown in Figure 1. Settlement intention exists as two policy-based latent factors, namely “welfare and health promotion” and “social participation and connectedness”, act as antecedents. Green policy leadership was added as a mediating variable to test its indirect effect on residents’ settlement intention.

Our hypotheses are listed in Table 2.

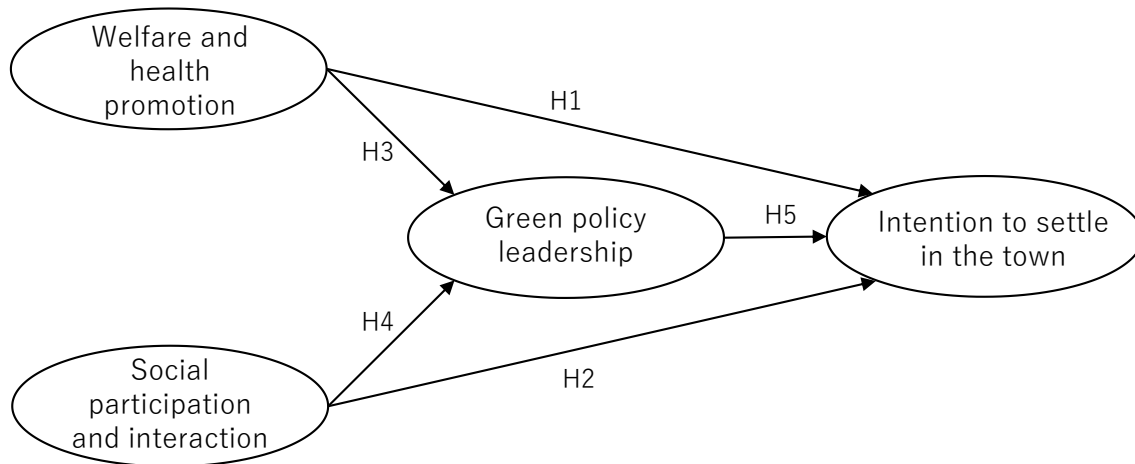


Figure 1: Conceptual model

Source: Generated by the authors

Number	Description of hypothesis
H1	Welfare and health promotion has a significant impact on intention to settle in the town.
H2	Social participation and interaction has a significant impact on intention to settle in the town.
H3	Welfare and health promotion has a significant impact on green policy leadership.
H4	Social participation and interaction has a significant impact on green policy leadership.
H5	Green policy leadership has a significant impact on intention to settle in the town.

Table 2: Hypotheses

Source: Generated by the authors

3. Methodology

3.1. Profile of the targeted city and the survey

City A is a suburban city with a population of approximately 82,000 inhabitants in the suburbs. According to the population based on the “Basic Resident Ledger” (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, 2019), the average population of City A, excluding towns and villages, is 128,000, and the median population is 69,000. City A was chosen as the subject of this quantitative study because it is considered a model case for uncovering residents’ awareness of the need to live in the same place for a long time.

A survey of residents’ attitudes was conducted in City A. A sample of 1,000 adults living in the city was randomly selected from the ‘Basic Resident Register’, and 571 replies were obtained by mail. The response rate was 57.1%. However, because covariance structure analysis requires complete data without missing values, 466 samples were available after data cleansing. Next, 46 questions were used as survey items. The

satisfaction level was assessed using Likert's five-point scale, with the options "satisfied", "generally satisfied", "undecided", "somewhat dissatisfied" and "dissatisfied" as "evaluation of the current situation". The attribute survey included seven items: gender, age, occupation, area of residence, years of residence, number of family members living together and the number of children under junior high school age. Descriptive statistics for each of these questions were examined, and the frequencies, means and standard deviations indicated that no abnormal values were found.

3.2. Factor analysis

The constructs and causal relationships were verified. The used software was IBM SPSS Statistics (version 26) and IBM SPSS AMOS (version 26) for structural equation modelling (SEM).

Table 3 shows 11 questions that were used in the survey and subjected to factor analysis. Social participation and interaction appeared as the first factor, welfare and health promotion as the second factor, green policy leadership as the third factor and intention to settle down as the fourth factor. Cronbach's alphas for data reliability were 0.758, 0.741, 0.737 and 0.793, respectively, all of which were above 0.70 (Hair et al., 1998). In other words, there was no problem with data reliability. Hence, the next step was to move on to SEM.

	1	2	3	4	Cronbach's alpha
Interaction between citizens and government	0.860	0.145	0.114	-0.003	0.758
Coexistence with foreign residents	0.827	0.116	0.108	0.119	
Women's participation in society	0.692	0.202	0.151	0.060	
Welfare services for citizens	0.082	0.787	0.159	0.144	0.741
Health promotion support	0.199	0.778	0.128	0.092	
Welfare services for disabled and elderly	0.193	0.773	0.133	0.038	
Clean landscape	0.120	0.055	0.830	0.122	0.737
Waste reduction and treatment facilities	0.085	0.180	0.796	0.062	
Measures to protect the global environment	0.165	0.179	0.729	0.049	
Desire to continue to live there	0.070	0.053	0.098	0.842	0.793
Good living conditions	0.066	0.162	0.088	0.817	

Notes:

Extraction method: Principal component analysis.

Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalisation.

Rotation converged in five iterations.

Table 3: Factor analysis

Source: Generated by the authors

3.3. SEM analysis

The SEM analysis was conducted based on the factor analysis. The results are presented in Figure 4. Details of the path coefficients and relevant statistical values are summarised in Table 5.

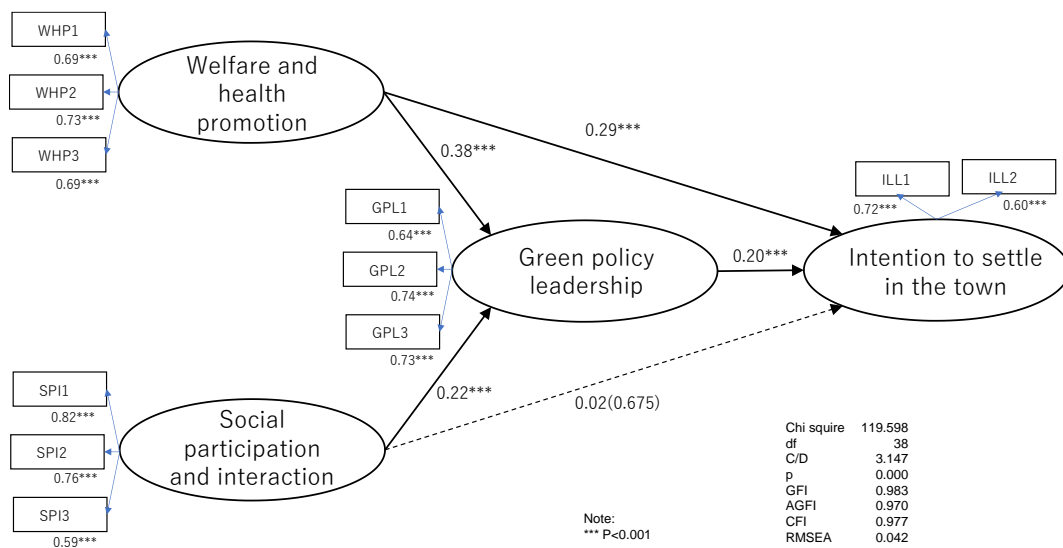


Figure 4: SEM analysis outcome

Source: Generated by the authors

			Path coefficient	p
Green policy leadership	←	Welfare and health promotion	0.376	***
Green policy leadership	←	Social participation and interaction	0.216	***
Intention to settle in the town	←	Green policy leadership	0.196	***
Intention to settle in the town	←	Welfare and health promotion	0.291	***
Intention to settle in the town	←	Social participation and interaction	0.021	0.675
WHP 1	←	Welfare and health promotion	0.687	1fix
WHP 2	←	Welfare and health promotion	0.730	***
WHP 3	←	Welfare and health promotion	0.693	***
GPL1	←	Green policy leadership	0.640	1fix
GPL 2	←	Green policy leadership	0.736	***
GPL3	←	Green policy leadership	0.729	***
SPI 1	←	Social participation and interaction	0.819	1fix
SPI 2	←	Social participation and interaction	0.760	***
SPI 3	←	Social participation and interaction	0.593	***
ILL 1	←	Intention to settle in the town	0.719	1fix
ILL 2	←	Intention to settle in the town	0.600	***

Note: 1fix mean regression weight is fixed as 1.

Table 5: Summary of SEM path coefficients

Source: Generated by the authors

In the SEM analysis, when drawing path diagrams, directly observable elements are represented by rectangles as observed variables. Not observed constructs are defined as latent variables being represented by ellipses. Figure 4, which depicts the conceptual model presented in Figure 1 as a path diagram, is the “settlement intention empirical model” in this study.

With regards to H1, the path coefficient from welfare and health promotion to the intention to settle in town is 0.291 ($p < 0.001$), which indicates the path relationship is significant. In case of H2, the path coefficient from social participation and interaction to intention to settle in town is 0.021 ($p > 0.05$), which means that this path is not statistically significant. Regarding H3, the path coefficient from welfare and health promotion to green policy leadership is 0.376 ($p < 0.001$), which indicates that this relationship is significant. In case of H4, the path coefficient from social participation and interaction to green policy leadership is 0.216 ($p < 0.001$), which means that this relationship is significant. Finally, regarding H5, the path coefficient from green policy leadership to intention to settle in the town is 0.196 ($p < 0.001$), which indicates that this relationship is also significant.

It needs to be considered whether the mediating effect, via the path from welfare and health promotion to the intention to settle in the town, is strongly related to green policy leadership, even when green policy leadership is not the intermediary. However, the path from social participation and interaction to the intention to settle in the town does not on its own lead to the intention to settle in the town. Furthermore, this path has a significant impact when green policy leadership is used as an intermediary. The results show that the path from social participation and interaction to the intention to settle in the town does not lead to the intention to settle only in the town. However, when citizens have a clear appreciation for the green policy leadership by the local government, they are inclined to settle in the town.

The relevant values that checked the SEM outcomes are discussed below. The goodness of fit index (GFI) is 0.983 (>0.90), the adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) is 0.970 (>0.90), the comparative fit index (CFI) is 0.977 (>0.90) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.042 (<0.080). All these indicators show that the model is highly reliable (Hayes, 2015). Table 6 summarises the results of the hypothesis testing.

3.4. Results of hypothesis testing

The hypotheses were tested using an empirical model of intention to settle, as shown in Table 6. Four hypotheses, including H1 (Welfare and health promotion has a significant impact on intention to settle in the town), H3 (Welfare and health promotion has a significant impact on green policy leadership), H4 (Social participation and interaction has a significant impact on green policy leadership) and H5 (Green policy leadership has a significant impact on intention to settle in the town) were accepted.

However, hypothesis H2 (Social participation and interaction has a significant impact on the intention to settle in the town) was rejected.

Number	Description of hypothesis	Result
H1	Welfare and health promotion has a significant impact on intention to settle in the town.	Accepted
H2	Social participation and interaction have a significant impact on intention to settle in the town.	Rejected
H3	Welfare and health promotion has a significant impact on green policy leadership.	Accepted
H4	Social participation and interaction have a significant impact on green policy leadership.	Accepted
H5	Green policy leadership has a significant impact on Intention to settle in the town.	Accepted

Table 6: Hypotheses results

Source: Generated by the authors

As important factors in increasing the attractiveness of towns and increasing the number of residents in times of population decline, this study focused on welfare and health promotion, social participation and exchange and environmental policy leadership. It quantitatively examined the impact of these three latent variables on the willingness to settle by any path. The results were verified in Section 3.4.

The results show that these factors are effective in improving the attractiveness of towns and increasing citizens' willingness to settle there, as revealed in Section 3.4. Furthermore, the impact of welfare and health promotion on the willingness to settle in a town remains pronounced when the impact is via the local government's leadership in environmental policy. This indicates that citizens who are highly concerned about welfare policy are highly conscious of the local government's leadership in environmental policy. This means that the impact of healthy welfare policies on the environment is more pronounced not only for citizens who are concerned about welfare policies but also for those who are concerned about environmental policies. In other words, support and protection through healthy welfare policies prove to be an important factor in people's desire to settle in a town when they understand the clear environmental policy leadership of the local municipality.

In comparison, social participation and interaction were also expected to increase the attractiveness of a town and stimulate people's desire to settle there. However, according to the results of the quantitative analysis, this direct path is not significant. Additionally, when this is promoted through environmental policy leadership, the effect is statistically significant. In other words, community involvement, as a common theme, shows that when citizens widely share the significance and meaning of a municipality's green policies, they become attached to and trust the concerned municipality and are more willing to settle.

Leadership in environmental policy can significantly affect a town's attractiveness. Environmental initiatives are an important element in today's society. In addition, a town's move to a sustainable direction through green leadership is an attractive factor for many people. Thus, an integrated approach that combines welfare and health promotion, social participation and interaction and environmental policy leadership is critical to increase a town's appeal and attract more permanent residents during this time of population decline.

4. Discussion

As important factors to increase a towns' attractiveness and number of residents in this time of population decline, the study focused on welfare and health promotion, social participation and exchange and environmental policy leadership. It quantitatively examined the impact of these three latent variables on the willingness to settle. The results were verified as described in Section 3.4. The results show that these factors are effective in improving a towns' attractiveness and increasing citizens' willingness to settle there. Furthermore, the impact of welfare and health promotion on the willingness to settle in a town remains pronounced when the impact is via the local government's leadership in environmental policy. This indicates that citizens who are highly concerned about welfare policies are also highly conscious of the local government's leadership in environmental policy. Thus, the impact of healthy welfare policies on the environment is not only pronounced for citizens who are concerned about welfare policies but also for those who are concerned about environmental policies. In other words, citizens' support and protection through healthy welfare policies are important in making citizens inclined to settle in a town when they understand the clear environmental policy leadership of the local municipality.

Additionally, social participation and interaction were expected to increase the towns' attractiveness and stimulate people's desire to settle there. However, the results of the quantitative analysis show that this direct path is not significant. Nevertheless, when this measure is promoted through environmental policy leadership, the effect is statistically significant. In other words, community involvement, as a common theme, shows that when citizens widely share the significance and meaning of a municipality's green policies, they become attached to and trust the concerning municipality and are willing to settle there.

Thus, leadership in environmental policy can significantly affect a town's attractiveness. Environmental initiatives are an important element in today's society, and a town's turn in a sustainable direction through green leadership will be an attractive factor for many people. In summary, an integrated approach that combines welfare and health promotion, social participation and interaction and environmental policy leadership is critical to increasing a town's appeal and attracting more permanent residents during times of population decline.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Theoretical contribution

In the empirical model of settlement intention presented in this paper, it is proved that settlement intention is influenced by three main latent factors: welfare and health promotion; social participation and interaction; green policy leadership. It is noteworthy that social participation and interaction alone do not significantly influence people's intention to settle in a town. However, when interspersed with green policy leadership as a mediating variable, it significantly influences the intention to settle in the concerned town. Thus, this study provides concrete suggestions for local governments' policymaking bodies.

5.2. Limitations

One limitation of this study is that the empirical model focuses solely on the specified latent factors, potentially overlooking other relevant variables that can impact settlement intention. Additionally, the scope of this study may not fully capture the cultural and demographic variations that influence settlement preferences.

5.3. Future research opportunities

To address these limitations, future research should explore the role of cultural and demographic factors in shaping settlement intention. Moreover, investigating the potential interplay between the identified factors and economic considerations may provide a more comprehensive understanding. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in settlement intention over time would contribute to assessing the long-term effectiveness of the suggested policy recommendations. Finally, extending the analysis to different geographic contexts would enhance the generalisability of the findings beyond the specific study area.

Authors' contribution: conceptualization, H.O.; methodology, H.O. and Y.Y.; software, Y.Y. and S.S.; validation, H.O. and Y.Y.; formal analysis, Y.Y. and S.S.; investigation, H.O.; resources, H.O. and Y.Y.; data curation, Y.Y.; writing-original draft preparation, H.O. and Y.Y.; writing-review and editing, H.O.; visualization, Y.Y.; supervision, H.O.; project administration, H.O.; funding acquisition, S.S.

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