

## Abstracts of Theses Approved for the PhD/MMed/MSc at the School of Medical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Kubang Kerian, Kelantan, Malaysia

### DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AS POTENTIAL MODERATOR AND MEDIATOR: REJECTION SENSITIVITY AND EMOTIONAL RECOGNITION OF FACIAL EXPRESSION IN ADULTS WHO ARE PURSUING TERTIARY EDUCATION

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**Introduction:** This research aims to extend some of research findings found in previous studies on rejection sensitivity level. Most research of rejection sensitivity was conducted in western country and none in Asian population. This research aims to investigate if the findings in Asian population is in line with findings in Western population.

**Objectives:** Examine if there is a difference in rejection sensitivity level between male and female adults who are currently pursuing tertiary education; Examine the relationship of rejection sensitivity level and emotional recognition of facial expression. Examine if depressive symptoms moderate or mediate the relationship of rejection sensitivity level and emotional recognition of facial expression.

**Methods:** This study is a correlational quantitative research design. 85 participants were recruited for the study. Each participant was required to attend a face-to-face session and answered several self-report questionnaires which are Adults Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (ARSQ), Beck Depression Inventory, 2nd edition (BDI-II) and a computerised test named Emotion Recognition Task (ERT). Results was analysed using SPSS software. The difference in rejection sensitivity level was analyzed using independent sample *t*-test, relationship of rejection sensitivity level and emotional recognition of facial expression as analysed using regression analysis and mediator, and moderator effect was analysed using built in PROCESS in SPSS.

**Results:** Result from the study shows there is no significant difference in rejection sensitivity level between male and female adults who are pursuing tertiary education. There is also no significant relationship between emotional recognition of facial expression. Lastly, result indicates that depressive symptoms does not moderate or mediate the relationship of rejection sensitivity level and emotional recognition of facial expression.

**Conclusion:** Results obtained from the research within Asian population is not in line with results in previous research within Western population. All hypothesis in research study failed to be rejected indicating none significant results in all objectives. However, there are a lot of limitations identified in this research especially when research was conducted during the pandemic of corona virus 2019 (COVID-19).

Supervisor:  
Professor Dr. Hairul Anuar Hashim

Co-supervisor:  
Dr. Asma Perveen

### THE EFFECTS OF AN ONLINE BRIEF MINDFULNESS ACTIVITIES TRAINING ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING OF MEDICAL OFFICERS: A PILOT STUDY

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**Introduction:** Empirical evidence suggested that psychological interventions can be successfully delivered online. Medical officers are under high levels of stress as the main frontliners managing the COVID-19 pandemic alongside their day-to-day roles, family obligations and research work.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to examine whether a brief mindfulness activities training for medical officers improve outcomes for depression, anxiety, stress and mindfulness.

**Methods:** A randomised, controlled trial (RCT) was conducted at Hospital Universiti Sains Malaysia where participants were randomly assigned to one of four groups of: i) low frequency intervention group (daily session over a week), ii) medium frequency intervention group (daily session over two weeks), iii) high frequency intervention group (daily session over three weeks) or iv) the control group. Outcome measures included the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) and the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS).

**Results:** Of the 22 participants, an increase in mindfulness, as measured by the MAAS, was found in the intervention group ( $P = 0.002$ ). There was also a reduction in depression levels ( $P = 0.01$ ) as measured by the DASS-21. The increase in mindfulness was observed in the low frequency and high frequency group, while the reduction of depression levels could not be observed between frequency groups. Participants self-reported increased relaxation and stress reduction.

**Conclusion:** This study provides insights into the feasibility and acceptability of an online, brief mindfulness activities training for medical officers. Findings will inform the future design and implementation of larger studies.

*Supervisor:*  
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*Co-supervisor:*  
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## THE EFFECTS OF SINGLE SESSION INTERVENTION ON PERCEIVED CONTROL: A PILOT STUDY TESTING GROWTH MINDSET AMONGST MALAYSIAN ADOLESCENTS

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**Introduction:** Growth mindset has previously been used as a therapeutic content in ameliorating internalising symptoms amongst adolescents. Growth mindset has been associated with greater perceived control and cognitive flexibility which in turns reduces internalising symptoms. The current study aims to provide pilot data for a localised version of single session intervention utilising growth mindset as the therapeutic content in improving levels of perceived control amongst adolescents.

**Objectives:** The objectives of the pilot study are to adapt the single session intervention into local content and to investigate the efficacy of single session intervention on primary perceived control and secondary perceived control measures.

**Methods:** The current study utilise a within-subjects design with a total of 28 participants recruited. The levels of primary perceived control divided into three subdomains (social, academic and behavioural) and secondary perceived control were measured at baseline and post-intervention time points utilising the PCSC and SCSC as outcome measures. Every participant received the intervention session individually via online platform—Zoom for 2 h.

**Results:** The results indicate improved level of primary perceived control related to social situations and overall secondary perceived control. There were no significant effects observed for primary perceived control related to academic and behavioural domains. The implication and limitations of the current pilot study were discussed.

**Conclusion:** Growth mindset has shown to serve as potential therapeutic effect in increasing levels of perceived control amongst adolescents. This raises the possibility of utilising growth mindset with a single session format in order to strengthen the level of perceived control and facilitate therapeutic effects.

*Supervisor:*  
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## A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AMONG ABA THERAPISTS WORKING WITH CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

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**Introduction:** Making a difference in the lives of children with autism have been gratifying for ABA therapists. It aimed to highlight the importance of their roles in providing ABA therapy for children with autism, simultaneously offering professional help for the parents. With more children being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), parents need professional help for their children with autism, showing the urgent need for ABA therapists. This study might help shine a light to ABA therapists as most studies mostly focus on the stress parents endure with children with autism. Therefore, this study can bring attention to the role and importance of ABA therapists in society.

**Objectives:** The objectives of this study were to explore ABA therapists' experiences in occupational stress working with children with autism, their sources of stress as well-as their coping strategies.

**Methods:** This is a qualitative study with a phenomenological design. A total of seven Malaysian ABA therapists were recruited using purposive and convenience samplings. All participants were virtually interviewed using Google Meet with a semi-structured format due to the Movement Control Order (MCO). The interviews were audio-recorded separately and privately in an individual session. The resulting transcriptions from the interviews were then analysed using thematic analysis.

**Results:** Themes obtained for the experiences of occupational stress are high-stress work and poor support from the management in the workplace. For sources of stress, the themes are role overload working with children with autism, working from home during MCO, powerlessness and challenging interactions with children with autism. As for coping strategies, the themes are self-care, grit towards working with children with autism and social support from colleagues.

**Conclusion:** In order to continue providing adequate services and therapy for children with autism, it is important that ABA therapists acknowledge their personal well-being by prioritising their mental health and continuing effective coping strategies such as reported in this study.

*Supervisor:*  
Dr. Mohd. Zulkifli Abdul Rahim

*Co-supervisor:*  
Dr. Asma Perveen

## GUIDED IMAGERY RELAXATION TECHNIQUE: ITS EFFECT ON STRESS AND WELL-BEING OF PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN KUBANG KERIAN, KELANTAN

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**Introduction:** With the global pandemic of COVID-19 circling around the world population since the beginning of 2020, to learn effective coping with negative emotional and behavioural experiences is especially a concern to the children and adolescents, who face restrictions on their physical movement and to do virtual learning at home.

**Objectives:** To study the effect of mindfulness-based approach, guided imagery relaxation technique on stress and well-being of elementary school children.

**Methods:** A pre-test, post-test randomised controlled trial study with a waitlist control group was designed to examine the objective stated above. Thirty-four Standard Five Al-Biruni and Al-Farabi students of Sekolah Kebangsaan Kubang Kerian II (SKKK-II) participated in current study were randomly assigned to intervention ( $N = 17$ ) or waitlist-control ( $N = 17$ ) groups. The participants from intervention group were required to attend four consecutive weekly monitoring session and practise to the audio guided imagery relaxation technique on daily basis. The children and their caregivers successfully completed the Stress in Children (SiC) Questionnaire Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire-Parent Reported (SDQ-PR) and tracking form across pre- and post-intervention time points.

**Conclusion:** The insignificance of result could possibly be discussed from four different factors: time availability, drop-out and adherence rates, Internet accessibility and connectivity, and differences in between making physical and virtual contact. Several useful implications and limitations of current study as well as recommendations for future studies are being explored to gain insights about the result of present study and add up the mindfulness based intervention-related experience to fill in the existing gap of knowledge.

*Supervisor:*  
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## THE EFFECT OF VIRTUAL MODE DEEP BREATHING INTERVENTION ON ANXIETY AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**Introduction:** COVID-19 pandemic that hits the world in 2019 impacts people in various aspects of life including the psychological aspect. It has induced anxiousness among people due to the uncertainty and fear of the pandemic and it is not exclusive towards adults only. Concurrently, a national survey suggested the prevalence of anxiety among children in Malaysia is alarming.

**Objectives:** Due to that, the current study was conducted to investigate the effect of deep breathing on the level of anxiety among primary school children via virtual-based intervention as well as to examine its feasibility.

**Methods:** A pre-test, post-test randomised controlled design was carried out with 28 students at a primary school in Kelantan. The students in the intervention group participated in a 4-week deep breathing intervention with weekly meetings with the researcher, whereas the participants in the control group did not receive any intervention.

**Results:** A repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted and showed no significant difference between the intervention and control group after 4-week of intervention. However, a paired sample *t*-test indicated a significant difference in the level of state anxiety within the participants in the intervention group and no significant difference for the control group. In contrast, there was no significant difference in the level of trait anxiety for both groups.

**Conclusion:** Despite the primary findings showed no significant result, there was a trend of declination for both state and trait anxiety, particularly for state anxiety. Thus, it could be suggested that the deep breathing exercise could help in reducing the level of anxiety and it is simple, quick and easy to be learned as well as applied by the children via virtual mode.

*Supervisor:*  
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## THE EFFECT OF GRATITUDE INTERVENTION ON ANXIETY AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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**Introduction:** Gratitude has been found to be related to lesser depression and anxiety level. In this study, we tested the effectiveness of a newly developed gratitude intervention protocol which combines several gratitude-based activities that have been thoroughly studied in previous research with some modifications on the available activities.

**Objectives:** To measure the effect of the 4-week gratitude intervention programme on anxiety and depressive symptoms, positive affect, negative affect and gratitude.

**Methods:** Participants ( $N = 43$ ) were recruited among undergraduate students of one public university in Malaysia. A total of 22 participants were assigned to the gratitude intervention group and another 21 participants were assigned to the control group. Instruments used to measure the outcome variables include the 21-item Malay translated Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (Malay-DASS), Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) and the six-item Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6), given as pre- and post-assessment.

**Results:** The results of the study show that the gratitude intervention programme led to a significant reduction in depressive and anxiety symptoms, lower negative affect, as well as increase in positive affect and gratitude level.

**Conclusion:** These findings suggest that gratitude intervention may be helpful to improve the psychological state of university students in Malaysia. These findings are in agreement with the broaden-and-build theory which suggests that gratitude as a positive emotion helps to broaden people's way of thinking instead of just focusing on the negatives. These skills developed from the experience of gratitude are important to help people cope with emotional difficulties and life adversities, which explain why the gratitude intervention caused reduction in depressive and anxiety symptoms.

Supervisor:  
Associate Professor Dr. Azizah Othman

## EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SELF-COMPASSION INTERVENTION TO REDUCE BODY DISSATISFACTION AMONG MALAYSIAN YOUNG ADULTS

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**Introduction:** With the rise of mental health issues among adults, the exploration of psychological interventions can be diversified to cater to this need as a public health measure of improving general well-being. One issue of concern is body dissatisfaction which influences individuals' perception of their physical appearance negatively. Research shows high levels of self-compassion is positively linked to better aspects of mental health and has benefits for body dissatisfaction. Previous studies found benefits of self-compassion intervention in reducing psychopathology including symptoms of body dissatisfaction.

**Objectives:** The current study aimed to examine whether there is a benefit of self-compassion intervention techniques in reducing levels of body dissatisfaction among young adults. To examine this, the pre- and post-experimental design was conducted to see whether online self-compassion intervention has benefits on two aspects which are self-compassion and body dissatisfaction.

**Methods:** Nine undergraduate students fully completed the brief online self-compassion group intervention. They participated in a bi-weekly 1-h online group intervention for four weeks, for eight sessions. Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) and Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) were used to measure their levels of self-compassion and body dissatisfaction, respectively. The participant's pre- and post-intervention levels of self-compassion and body dissatisfaction were compared to identify any significant differences.

**Results:** Paired sample  $t$ -test showed no difference in both self-compassion levels and body dissatisfaction levels before and after the intervention.

**Conclusion:** The current study lacks a sample size to arrive at a conclusive result. However, the intervention did not negatively affect levels of self-compassion or body dissatisfaction and can be considered safe. Implications are discussed and recommendation for future research is included.

Supervisor:  
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## PERSONAL RECOVERY IN DEPRESSION: THE ROLE OF PEER SUPPORT IN MALAYSIA

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**Introduction:** Rising depression burden of disease on individuals themselves and society at large has spurred efforts to uncover appropriate recovery-oriented practices. In Malaysia, the role of peer support has not been adequately understood nor implemented into frameworks of recovery for depression despite its efficacy shown in overseas studies.

**Objectives:** This study investigates service users' experiences of personal recovery and its conceptualisations, processes and outcomes through peer support, and peer support mechanisms that support personal recovery in depression.

**Methods:** A qualitative study design was undertaken and guided by the constructivist grounded theory methods with a pragmatic approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine participants; verbatim transcripts were coded and analysed with a constant comparison method, until theoretical saturation was achieved.

**Results:** The analysis showed that personal recovery is conceptualised as a journey through the four prominent stages of: i) awareness, ii) acceptance, iii) adaptation and iv) advancement, generated by intrapersonal (i.e. cognitive flexibility and self-efficacy) and interpersonal (i.e. connectedness to support and resources and prosocial engagement) processes when service users are engaged in peer support mechanism consisting of identity (i.e. lived experiences and commonalities), relation (i.e. accessibility and safety) and impact (i.e. modeling and words) dimensions. These emergent concepts were integrated to construct the Peer Support Depression Recovery Framework.

**Conclusion:** Peer support in Malaysia is experienced as helpful for service users to catalyse personal recovery in depression, similar to preceding studies. The implications and limitations of this study are discussed along with recommendations for future studies.

*Supervisor:*

*Professor Dr. Intan Hashimah Mohd Hashim*

*Co-supervisor:*

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## THE EFFECT OF GENERAL AND BODY-SPECIFIC SELF-COMPASSION ON WOMEN'S BODY IMAGE AND SELF-COMPASSION VIA INSTAGRAM

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**Introduction:** Since the past decade, social media has been known for its negative effects towards body image. Recent studies have shown that social media can be used to deliver positive messages (e.g. self-compassion) as well.

**Objectives:** Thus, this study generally aimed to investigate the effects of viewing general and body-specific self-compassion captions and quotes on Instagram on women's body image and self-compassion. This study plays a role in understanding the positive use of social media in reducing body dissatisfaction which tends to lead to disordered eating behaviours and eating disorders.

**Methods:** A 2 (general self-compassion and body-specific self-compassion) × 2 (captions and quotes) between-group design was conducted among Malaysian women ( $N = 144$ ) where they are briefly exposed to Instagram content that are conveying self-compassion messages. The participants were also measured on their body dissatisfaction, body appreciation and self-compassion pre- and post-exposure.

**Results:** Results found that: i) there were no significant differences between pre- and post-exposure measures for all outcome variables, ii) there were no significant differences between general and body-specific self-compassion, and between captions and quotes, iii) appearance comparison and thin-ideal internalisation significantly predicted the outcome variables. The major findings showed that both type of self-compassion and type of Instagram content did not cause an effect towards women's body image. It also supported the role of appearance comparison and thin-ideal internalisation between media influence and body image.

**Conclusion:** This implies that the tripartite model and social comparison theory is supported. However, brief self-compassion exposure may not be enough to affect women's body image.

*Supervisor:*

*Professor Dr. Rahmattullah Khan Abdul Wahab Khan*

## EXPERIENCES TOWARDS DISTANCE EDUCATION DURING COVID-19: EXPLORING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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**Objectives:** The purpose of this exploratory study is to obtain first-hand accounts of Malaysian university students' experiences who had to continue distance education during COVID-19 pandemic disease period, about the psychological distress they experienced and the strategies to cope with the challenges in distance education.

**Methods:** The design of this study was qualitative and explorative in nature. One-to-one interview were carried out in individual setting with several semi-structured questions used as a guidance. A total of 10 participants were included in this research study.

**Results:** Nine themes emerged from the data regarding the causes of distress experienced by the final year university students. They are digital fatigue and technological difficulties, being trapped indoors, less opportunities to bond physically, poor discussion, adapting to new routine, adapting to new learning method, little to no boundaries, poorer physical health and incompetency for clinical and technical skills. As for the coping strategies, two themes emerged from the data which are problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies.

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, the nine causes of distress are linked to increased risk factors of developing poorer mental health such as anxiety disorder and depression. The result of this study can help aid relevant agencies and groups to create effective strategies to tackle the students' concerns and create a better future for the education system in Malaysia.

*Supervisor:*  
Mrs. Nor Firdous Mohamed

## A STUDY ON KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE AND ATTITUDE OF TEACHERS TOWARDS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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**Introduction:** The recent approach of the Malaysian Education system to provide an equal education for individuals with special needs, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has presented challenges for public school teachers.

**Objectives:** This study was conducted to investigate the relationship between the three main constituents of autism awareness; knowledge, attitude and experience.

**Methods:** In order to satisfy the main objective, quantitative research was designed, using Autism Awareness Scale. A total of 120 school-teachers from the public schools around Johor Bahru were anonymously surveyed. Survey questions included: demographics, educating experience, professional development and/ or training, educators' knowledge about autism, educators' experience with individuals with autism and attitude towards them. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation and regression analysis were employed to analyse the data.

**Results:** Results highlight significant positive relationship between teaching experience and autism knowledge,  $r = 0.87$ ,  $P < 0.001$ . Quantitative experience exhibits significant positive correlation with autism knowledge ( $r = 0.71$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) and attitude ( $r = 0.54$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). Based on the regression model the teachers' knowledge about autism predicts their attitude towards individual with autism.

**Conclusion:** Findings of this research are important in understanding the importance of increasing autism knowledge and exposure among school-teachers in facilitating a quality learning environment for individuals with ASD.

*Supervisor:*  
Dr. Asma Perveen

## A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON MALAYSIAN POLICE OFFICERS EXPERIENCES TOWARDS SUSPECTS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

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**Introduction:** With the influx of individuals with mental illness in community and prison, law enforcers, specifically police officers, have become frontline professionals who manage these persons when they are in crisis. Despite that, little is known about police officers' experiences in this process especially in Malaysian settings.

**Objectives:** The present qualitative study aimed to explore police experiences towards suspect with mental illness.

**Methods:** Using in-depth semi-structured interview, a total of eight female police officers from Sexual, Women and Child Investigation Division (D11) of the Criminal Investigation Department took part in the study.

**Results:** Four main themes emerged from the thematic analysis which are: i) Understanding of Mental Illness, ii) Opinions Towards Suspects with Mental Illness, iii) Interaction with Suspects Who are Mentally Ill and iii) Initiatives Required to Improved Responses in Mental Illness.

**Conclusion:** These findings contribute to current understanding on Malaysian police settings specifically in mental health. Also, this study helps to raise awareness on police officers' current needs and initiatives needed to improve responses in mental health. Limitation of the study include the lacked actual representation of Malaysian police officers in the sample and possible interviewer bias. Future research should include police officers in different demographic such as male police officers, police officers from different division and police officers from other districts or states.

*Supervisor:*  
Dr. Fatanah Ramlee

## THE ROLE OF PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING BETWEEN DEPRESSED AND NON-DEPRESSED UNIVERSITY STUDENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN MALAYSIA

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**Objectives:** The present study aims to examine the role of perceived social support on psychological well-being between depressed and non-depressed university students during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia.

**Methods:** A stratified sampling method was utilised to invite participants to participate in the online self-report questionnaires on Google Form and the inclusion criteria of being Malaysian citizens, 18 years old–25 years old and undergraduate students in Malaysia were written on the e-flyer and e-announcement.

**Results:** A total number of 244 (male = 112, female = 132) university students participated in the study and a prevalence rate of 50.41% of depression. The present study found a strong significant positive correlation between perceived social support and psychological well-being among depressed university students ( $r = 0.769$ ). The present study reported there are significant differences on the perceived social support and psychological well-being between depressed and non-depressed university students. The present study discovered perceived social support from family and significant other was reported lowest among university students who experienced significant depressive symptoms. Their positive relations with others and self-acceptance on the domain of psychological well-being were also found to be the weakest. Non-depressed university students reported significantly higher on their perceived social support and psychological well-being than university students with significant depressive symptoms. The significant role of perceived social support should be promoted as an effective intervention for university students due to its accessibility and cost during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Conclusion:** Future research should look into the effectiveness of perceived social support for university students with different mental health concerns.

*Supervisor:*

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## THE PREDICTING EFFECT OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA ON EMOTION REGULATION LEADING TO ANXIETY, STRESS AND DEPRESSION AMONG ADULTS IN MALAYSIA

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**Objectives:** The primary objective of the current study is to identify the predicting effect of childhood trauma on emotional regulation leading to anxiety, stress and depression among adults in Malaysia.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional survey method was adopted as the study design. An online survey which consist of three different instrument of measurement (Childhood Trauma Questionnaire [CTQ], Emotion Regulation Questionnaire [ERQ] and Depression Anxiety Stress Scale [DASS21]) was distributed out via emails and invitations through social media.

**Results:** A total of sample size of 390 (male = 207, female = 183) participated in the study. Participants were in the age range of 21 years old to 40 years old. The findings

indicated that there is a significant predicting effect of childhood trauma on emotional regulation leading to anxiety, stress and depression among adults in Malaysia. Each type of childhood trauma was found to have a significant relationship with emotion dysregulation leading to potential development of psychopathology. The current study identified that childhood trauma affects the emotion regulation ability of an individual negatively which may cause a high chance of development of anxiety, stress and depression symptoms.

**Conclusion:** This study lays out a platform with the information given for future researches to take place in order to have a deeper understanding on the etiology of psychopathology from different point of view and factors that can contribute to the onset of mental illness.

*Supervisor:*

*Dr. Asma Perveen*

## IDENTIFICATION OF ATTITUDES THAT PREDICT THE INTENTIONS OF PARENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN TO SEEK FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP

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**Objectives:** The present study aims to examine specific attitudes that would predict the intention of parents with children with special needs to seek for psychological help.

**Methods:** A stratified sampling method was utilised to invite participants in an online self-report questionnaire on Google Form with the inclusion criteria that the respondent must be Malaysian, a parent whose child has been formally diagnosed with a disability, and that the respondents must be able to read and understand written English.

**Results:** A total of 150 (female = 99, male = 51) participated in this study whom were recruited across various social media platform, from parents with children with special needs. The present study found two attitudes that were strongly endorsed by parents and have shown to be a significant contributor to the intention to seek for psychological help. These attitudes were ‘The idea of talking about problems with a psychologist strikes me as a poor way to get rid of emotional conflicts’ and ‘Considering the time and expense involved in psychotherapy, it would have doubtful value for a person like me’. The two attitudes relate to recognition of the value of, and need for, treatment. Both items relate to recognition of problematic symptoms.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, the attitudes that are associated with intentions to seek personal treatment in this study relate to the recognition of symptoms, and the value of, and need for, professional help. Other than that, this study further determined with significant correlations that social-stigma, gender and age are contributory.

*Supervisor:*

*Dr. Asma Perveen*

## HAVE YOU 'REDDIT': ONLINE COPING AS A MODERATOR BETWEEN FREQUENCY OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS IN THE r/MALAYSIA AND r/MYHAPPYPILL POPULATION

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**Introduction:** The rise of social media use has created interest in researching how does it impact the health of its users. Some association has been shown to link depression with social media use. However, concurrent with the growth of social media is the increase engagement in online coping to mitigate stressors such as depression.

**Objectives:** The purpose of this was to investigate the presence of interaction of online coping between the relationship of social media use and depressive symptoms.

**Methods:** After initial screening process, a total of 135 participants from the subreddit r/Malaysia and r/Myhappypill answered the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II), Depression domain from DASS-21, the online coping scale and the Frequency of activity on Reddit, extracted and modified from the Media and Technology Usage and Attitudes Scale (MTUAS).

**Results:** Multiple regression analysis indicated that adaptation of online coping in the form of disengagement moderate the association between frequency of social media use and depressive symptoms ( $R^2 = 0.185$ ). The prevalence of depression was also found to 68% within the r/Malaysia and r/Myhappypill.

**Conclusion:** There is an interaction between online coping and the relationship between frequency of social media use and depression. However, the interaction was only to be found with one out of three coping strategies. Future research calls for a more representative sample size and different forms coping.

Supervisor:  
Dr. Salami Mutiu Olagoke

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COPING STYLES, PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS, BURNOUT AND ANXIETY AMONG HEALTHCARE PERSONNEL

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**Introduction:** Anxiety is a disorder that may cause individuals to be anxious or worried. Healthcare personnel have been linked to higher anxiety as compared to other working populations. There are a lot of factors that may contribute to greater anxiety among healthcare personnel such as burnout symptoms and psychosocial factors at the workplace. Coping mechanisms have been shown linked in mediating the relationship between burnout and anxiety.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to determine the relationship between burnout and anxiety, mediated by coping style, and to investigate the relationship between psychosocial factors at work and anxiety among healthcare personnel.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional online survey was conducted using a purposive sampling method. A total of 150 participants ( $N = 150$ ) completed the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory, the Job Content Questionnaire, the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations and the Beck Anxiety Inventory. Multiple regression and mediation analyses were done for the analysis.

**Results:** The result showed that emotion-oriented coping styles mediated the relationship between client-related burnout and anxiety among Sultan Ahmad Shah Medical Centre healthcare personnel. Client-related burnout and work-related burnout showed a direct significant relationship with anxiety among healthcare personnel. While the study did not identify any noteworthy predictors of psychosocial factors for anxiety, it did emphasise that physical demands emerged as a factor contributing to anxiety among healthcare personnel.

**Conclusion:** This study provides better insight into the relationship between psychosocial factors at work and anxiety in the context of healthcare personnel groups. This study also shed light on how different coping mechanisms could mediate the relationship between burnout and anxiety. The findings show current burnout or anxiety literature, expand on the current theory of burnout and implicate how upper management could contribute to better management of burnout or anxiety among healthcare personnel.

Supervisor:  
Dr. Md Azman Shahadan

Co-supervisor:  
Associate Professor Dr. Geshina Ayu Mat Saat

## THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SELF-EFFICACY IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRAIT MINDFULNESS AND EXISTENTIAL ANXIETY

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**Introduction:** The transition from university life to the working world can be stressful for young adults and evoke a sense of existential anxiety. The recent COVID-19 pandemic may have further exuberated feelings of existential anxiety between young adults. Trait mindfulness can be an effective factor in mitigating the symptoms of existential anxiety. One of the possible underlying mechanism could mediate the relationship between trait mindfulness and anxiety would be an individual's self-efficacy.

**Objectives:** The aim of the current study is to investigate the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between trait mindfulness and existential anxiety among young adults.

**Methods:** A quantitative approach using a cross-sectional research design was adopted to investigate the relationship of the variables. The questionnaire consisting of the existential concerns questionnaire, the general self-efficacy scale and the mindfulness attention awareness scale was administered online. A total of 312 participants consisting of young adults who graduated between the years of 2020 and 2022 were recruited. However, a total of 275 participants were retained after data cleaning and the removal of outliers. Descriptive and inferential analysis was carried in order to tabulate the results of the study. The descriptive analysis involved a description of the participants' demographics and to determine outliers. The inferential statistic on the other hand, consisted of assumption testing, reliability analysis and hypothesis testing using 'process macro'.

**Results:** The study found that young adults who have higher trait mindfulness tend to have lower existential anxiety and higher self-efficacy. Additionally, young adults with higher self-efficacy tend to experience lower levels of existential anxiety. However, when controlling for self-efficacy the relationship between trait mindfulness and existential anxiety remained significant. Therefore, self-efficacy only partially mediated the relationship between trait mindfulness and existential anxiety.

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, trait mindfulness acts as a buffer against existential anxiety with the help of self-efficacy. Nevertheless, self-efficacy may only be one of the factors that mediate the relationship between trait mindfulness and existential anxiety. The results of the current study can further expand on the role of trait mindfulness and self-efficacy in the terror management theory. Furthermore, in practice the results found may provide more insight to practitioners in choosing therapies which include mindfulness such as ACT and building self-efficacy in young adults who have existential anxiety.

*Supervisor:*  
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## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION LITERACY AND MENTAL HEALTH HELP-SEEKING ATTITUDES AMONGST MALAYSIANS

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**Introduction:** Knowledge about postpartum depression is important for early illness identification and early intervention.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to measure the level of postpartum depression literacy and mental health help-seeking attitudes among Malaysians; and the moderating effects of gender, age and education level on the relationship between mental health help-seeking attitudes and postpartum depression literacy.

**Methods:** This cross-sectional survey involved 325 Malaysians ( $N = 325$ ) who were recruited online. The postpartum depression literacy scale (PoDLiS), and the Mental Help-Seeking Attitudes Scale (MHSAS) were completed.

**Results:** The results revealed that postpartum depression literacy is significantly correlated to mental health help-seeking attitudes ( $r_s = 0.156$ ,  $P$ -value  $< 0.001$ ). No moderation effects of gender, age, or education level were found.

**Conclusion:** This study showed that knowledge about postpartum depression is important in relation to Malaysians' attitudes towards seeking mental health services. Further research specifically on psychoeducational program is needed to improve the public's knowledge about postpartum depression literacy and shape positive attitudes towards seeking mental health services in Malaysia.

*Supervisor:*  
Dr. Nor Firdous Mohamed

## THE MEDIATING EFFECTS OF COPING MECHANISMS AND PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BURNOUT AND QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG HEALTHCARE WORKERS

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**Introduction:** Burnout is an occupational hazard that adversely affects the individuals' quality of life. This is especially true among healthcare workers whose job are demanding and people oriented.

**Objective:** The aim of this study was to examine the mediating roles of coping mechanisms and perceived social support in the relationship between burnout and QOL among HCWs.

**Methods:** An online survey was conducted involving 181 participants, recruited through snowball and purposive sampling techniques. The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI), Brief Coping Oriented to Problem Experience Inventory (BRIEF COPE), Meaning-Centered Coping Scale (MCCS), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and World Health Organization Quality-of-Life Scale (WHOQOL-BREF) in English and Malay languages were distributed to the participants to assess their burnout level, level of coping style, perceived social support level and their quality of life.

**Results:** Using Structural Equation Modelling analysis with copings (including problem-focused, emotion-focused and meaning-centred copings) and perceived social support as mediator, the findings showed reasonable model fit (DF = 1.862; GFI = 0.936; NFI = 0.933; CFI = 0.967; TLI = 0.950; RMSEA = 0.073). Specifically, perceived social support partially mediates the relationship between burnout and quality of life ( $\beta = -0.11$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ; Indirect  $\beta = -0.11$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, burnout also positively predicts emotion-focused coping ( $\beta = 0.44$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) and negatively predicts meaning-centred coping ( $\beta = -0.46$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) and perceived social support ( $\beta = -0.31$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). In addition, problem-focused coping positively predicts meaning-centred coping ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) while perceived social support also positively predicts meaning-centered coping ( $\beta = 0.32$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ).

**Conclusion:** Current findings revealed the complex interplays of coping mechanisms, perceived social support in the context of burnout. The findings call for equipping healthcare workers with the appropriate coping mechanisms and sufficient social support to prevent and manage burnout.

*Supervisor:*  
Professor Dr. Hairul Anuar Hashim

*Co-supervisor:*  
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## CLINICAL UTILITY OF USING REY'S AUDITORY VERBAL LEARNING TEST IN THE ASSESSMENT OF VERBAL MEMORY IN PEOPLE WITH EPILEPSY

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**Introduction:** Verbal memory (VM) is an important aspect of cognitive functioning that involves the ability to encode, store, and retrieve verbal information. Impairment

in VM can affect one's learning abilities, leading to increased psychological distress and reduced quality of life (QoL).

**Objectives:** This study aimed to determine the prevalence and factors leading to verbal learning and memory impairment among people with epilepsy (PWE) using Rey's Auditory Verbal Learning Test (RAVLT).

**Methods:** A cross-sectional prospective study trial was employed to address the study's aim. Participants answered a questionnaire eliciting personal information, emotional states (depression, NDDI-E; anxiety and GAD-7) and QoL measures (QOLIE-31) before being scheduled for RAVLT. RAVLT provides information on PWE's short-term memory, interference, delayed recall and recognition memory. The data were age-stratified according to the metanorms and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

**Results:** A total of 30 PWE participated, with a mean age of 39.9 years old (range 22 years old–69 years old). About 63.3% had focal epilepsy ( $n = 19$ ) and the remaining 36.7% ( $n = 11$ ) had generalised epilepsy. Most of them were on multiple AEDs (53.3%) and drug-resistant (50.0%). The prevalence of VM and learning impairment was 40.0%, commonly reported among those with focal seizures. Among the TLE group, left-TLE had overall poor verbal learning and memory dysfunction compared to right-TLE. Findings showed that VM was significantly correlated with a person's age, education, number of AEDs, depression, and QoL. Regression analysis revealed that the overall QoL, age, and education are significant predictors for the mean RAVLT scores.

**Conclusion:** This study revealed that impairment in verbal learning and memory is highly prevalent in PWE. The repercussions of memory impairment can be as devastating as seizure control. In the clinical setting, RAVLT is a reliable and cost-effective tool in identifying PWE who are at risk for memory dysfunction.

*Supervisors:*  
Dr. Aroyewun Temitope Folashade

*Co-supervisors:*  
Dr. Mohamed Faiz Mohamed Mustafar

## THE MODERATING EFFECTS OF MEANING-CENTERED COPING ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AND DEFICITS IN WORKING MEMORY DURING COMPLICATED GRIEF

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**Introduction:** Grief is a natural response to loss, and while most individuals gradually adapt and heal over time, some may experience complicated grief (CG) characterised by persistent low mood, intense distress and cognitive impairment. Coping strategies are essential for managing grief and meaning-centred coping appears particularly beneficial, leading to positive emotions and improved cognitive functioning. Emotion-focused coping may exacerbate depressive symptoms and working memory impairments, while problem-focused coping may offer limited benefits.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to explore coping strategies utilised by bereaved individuals facing complicated grief and how these strategies may predict better psychological and cognitive outcomes.

**Methods:** A total of 20 bereaved individuals (male = 5, female = 15) aged between 27 years old and 65 years old ( $M = 42.25$ ,  $SD = 9.30$ ) were recruited from Hospital Universiti Sains Malaysia (HUSM) following the loss of a loved one due to physical illness. Participants were screened for complicated grief and subsequently completed self-report assessments of coping strategies and depressive symptoms using Brief Grief Questionnaire (BGQ), Brief COPE Questionnaire, Meaning-Centered Coping Scale (MCCS) and Patient Health Questionnaire-9 Items (PHQ-9). Additionally, participants underwent a neurocognitive assessment of working memory using the n-Back Task.

**Results:** The results of this study demonstrated caregivers with complicated grief suffered from moderate severity of depressive symptoms ( $M = 17.45$ ,  $SD = 4.43$ ) as they coping with the losses. Furthermore, the findings showed that that meaning-centered coping significantly predicted lower levels of depressive symptoms ( $b = -0.50$ ,  $t(16) = -2.25$ ,  $P = 0.039$ ), even when accounting for the variances of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. However, none of the coping strategies demonstrated a significant effect on accuracy of working memory ( $R^2 = 0.20$ ,  $F(3,16) = 1.32$ ,  $P = 0.303$ ) and response time of working memory ( $R^2 = 0.20$ ,  $F(3,16) = 1.36$ ,  $P = 0.291$ ). Moreover, meaning-centred coping was not found to moderate the relationship between depressive symptoms and working memory ( $b < 0.00$ ,  $t(16) = 0.21$ ,  $P = 0.834$ ).

**Conclusion:** These findings emphasise the potential benefits of meaning-centred coping in alleviating depressive symptoms among bereaved individuals, contributing to the existing literature on grief studies. They also indicate the potential applicability of meaning-centred techniques in developing grief interventions for bereaved individuals at risk for developing psychopathology.

Supervisor:

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Co-supervisor:

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## THE OCCURRENCE OF EXPRESSED ANGER IN INDIVIDUALS SUFFERING FROM ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

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**Introduction:** The common diagnosis of anxiety and depression calls for continuous extensive study on the disorders, including topics of anger to ensure more accurate and precise addressing of treatment plans. In the Malaysian context, anger has primarily been explored in terms of aggression, rather than other subdomains.

**Objectives:** The current study was conducted to investigate the occurrence of anger expression among individuals diagnosed with anxiety and depression, as well as the differences between the disorders.

**Methods:** Through purposive sampling, samples were based on diagnosed subjects registered in the Psychiatric Clinic of Hospital Universiti Sains Malaysia, with the administrations conducted via physical administration or online survey. A total of 36 subjects were finalised in the study, 21 of which belonged to the anxiety group and 15 to the depression group.

**Results:** The findings of the study reported individuals from both groups had a higher tendency to internalise their anger with anxiety group having an average score of 2.95 ( $SD = 3.81$ ) and depression having average score of 23.47 ( $SD = 4.22$ ). Moreover, both diagnosis groups reported no significant difference in the context of expressed anger with reported  $P$ -value of 0.831 ( $P > 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** The study indicated a general proneness of individuals, specifically those diagnosed with either anxiety or depressive disorder, towards internalising their anger. Acknowledging the limitations present including the small sample size and time constraints, the findings of the study are hoped to contribute to the initiation of empirical studies on anxiety, depression and anger expression. Consequently, the study will hopefully contribute to better planning and management of future therapies to be conducted.

Supervisor:

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Co-supervisor:

Associate Professor Dr. Azizah Othman

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## CAREGIVER STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES IN TAKING CARE OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

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**Introduction:** Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was categorised as a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects the functioning of the child together with the family. Becoming a caregiver of an autistic child presents a different set of parenting difficulties and stressors.

**Objectives:** The current study was conducted to investigate the stress level and coping strategies used by caregivers in taking care of children with autism.

**Methods:** A total number of 121 caregivers participated in this study and completed Autism Parenting Stress Index (APSI) and Brief-COPE Questionnaire. The survey was distributed online to a few special needs centres in Klang Valley.

**Results:** Results of the study found that caregiver stress was related to the caregivers' age, the child's age and the presence of receiving professional support. Besides, the coping strategy that significantly related to caregiver stress was the avoidant coping style.

**Conclusion:** The findings of this research have significant implications for the way professionals can assist families of children with autism. Professionals should focus on supporting the caregivers, as the caregiver's functioning immediately affects the children. Therefore, in order to better educate treatments for caregivers of children with autism, which may lessen their burden, future studies could concentrate on exploring interventions that focus on enabling caregivers to cope with everyday challenges when related to the role of caregiving.

*Supervisor:*  
*Dr. Salami Mutiu Olagoke*

## **ATTENTIONAL BIAS TO HIGH CALORIC FOODS AND LOW CALORIC FOODS IN HIGH AND HEALTHY BODY MASS INDEX ADULTS VIA EYE-TRACKING AND VISUAL SEARCH TASK**

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**Introduction:** Contemporary obesogenic environment poses a heightened risk for individuals with high body mass index (BMI), rendering them more susceptible to the hedonic effects of high-caloric foods (HCF), as elucidated in the incentive sensitisation theory of addiction. This thereby contributes to long-term physical and psychological health complications.

**Objectives:** The objective of the current study was to ascertain the presence of AB towards both HCF and low-caloric foods (LCF) cues among Malaysian adults with varying BMI categories, employing an eye-tracking device with a visual search task. Specifically, this investigation

sought to examine eye-tracking parameters, including fixation count, total fixation duration, time to first fixation, and first fixation duration, as indicators of AB.

**Methods:** This study was set up as a cross-sectional, quasi-experimental research design with two groups investigating the relationship between levels of BMI and the four eye-tracking parameters (i.e. fixation count, total fixation duration, time to first fixation and first fixation duration) in detecting food cues using a visual search task. Incorporating non-probability sampling techniques like convenience, purposive and snowball sampling, this study was conducted among 38 students and staffs in Hospital Universiti Sains Malaysia.

**Results:** Findings of this study revealed no significant differences in AB patterns between individuals with high and healthy BMI in response to both HCF and LCF cues.

**Conclusion:** This lack of significant findings can be largely attributed to the study's sample population, inconsistencies in methodological approaches across studies, as well as the intricate nature of attentional mechanisms, thereby rendering cross-study comparisons inconclusive. Future research should incorporate more objective measures and rigorous methodologies to unravel the complexities inherent in this intricate cognitive mechanism.

*Supervisor:*  
*Dr. Mohamed Faiz Mohamed Mustafar*

*Co-supervisor:*  
*Dr. Asma Perveen*

## **THE STUDY OF GAZE BEHAVIOUR OF SOCIALLY ANXIOUS INDIVIDUALS DURING VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION USING EYE-TRACKING**

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**Introduction:** Social anxiety is a debilitating disorder that affects an individual's ability to engage in successful social interactions. Abnormalities in gaze behaviours have been observed in individuals with social anxiety, but the specific attentional components involved are still unclear due to inconsistent findings in previous research.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to compare the attentional components across different locations of interest: eyes, head, mouth, nose, upper body and lower body between individuals with high and low social anxiety symptoms during a virtual communicative task.

**Methods:** Participants ( $N = 34$ ) completed the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) and were categorised into two participant groups: i) high social anxiety and ii) low social anxiety. Participants engaged in a communicative task with a confederate through a pre-recorded video in a virtual setting while their eye movements were recorded.

**Results:** Regardless of social anxiety level, all participants had a general tendency to first fixate on the eye region. However, high social anxiety participants showed prolonged time to first fixate on the mouth. The nose had consistently low initial fixation for both groups. Furthermore, high social anxiety participants exhibited fewer number of fixations and shorter fixation durations on the eye region compared to low social anxiety participants.

**Conclusion:** This study sheds light on the gaze behaviours exhibited by individuals with social anxiety during virtual communicative tasks. The findings reveal the presence of both early hypervigilance and avoidance patterns, particularly towards the eye region, indicating heightened sensitivity to social threats.

*Supervisor:*

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