9th ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF APPLIED PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE MIDDLE EAST

17TH NOVEMBER 2022 – THURSDAY

CONFERENCE CHAIR

Dr. Anita Kashi

CONFERENCE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Ms. Aditi Bhatia

Dr Nishtha Lamba

Ms. Denise Andrzejewski

Ms. Mariam Melad

Conference Link (Via Microsoft Teams)

[Psychology Conference Link](#)

WELCOME ADDRESS

DR. CEDWYN
FERNANDES
Director Middlesex
University Dubai
Pro Vice-Chancellor
Middlesex University

A very warm welcome to the Ninth Annual Conference of Applied Psychological Research in the Middle East, organized by the Psychology Department at Middlesex University Dubai. Keeping the accessibility of the conference to a wider audience the conference will be hosted hybrid. This conference will be of interest to both academics and practitioners alike and to anyone with a keen interest in psychology. I am delighted to welcome our special guest and keynote speaker Dr. David Giofrè who is an associate (tenured) professor at the University of Genoa, Italy. He spent a significant period of research at the Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta, USA), and has been lecturing for several years at the Liverpool John Moores University (Liverpool, UK). The Psychology Department at Middlesex University Dubai, led by Dr. Anita Shrivastava Kashi, has put together with Ms. Aditi Bhatia, Ms. Denise Andrzejewski, Dr. Nishtha Lamba, and Ms. Mariam Melad an excellent conference programme. The contribution of Dr. Lynda Hyland, and Ms. Seada Kassie, along with other members of the psychology team, has added significantly to the organization of this event. Middlesex University Dubai is London's first and only campus in the UAE, and the first university to offer a master's programme in Applied Psychology. At the undergraduate level, Middlesex University offers the opportunity for students to graduate with an Honours degree in Psychology with a range of diverse pathways. As the leading University in Psychology in the region, we are pleased to host our 9th psychology conference. I wish you a successful and fruitful event.

WELCOME ADDRESS

DR. ANITA
SHRIVASTAVA KASHI
Head and Associate
Professor Department
of Psychology,
Middlesex University
Dubai

On behalf of the Department of Psychology, Middlesex University Dubai, I would like to warmly welcome you all to the 9th Annual Conference of Applied Psychological Research in the Middle East. This first hybrid psychology conference will showcase an excellent Keynote address by Dr. David Giofrè on "Intelligence in children with neurodevelopmental disorders", followed by Oral paper presentations, practitioner sessions, and an action-oriented workshop on "Stress: the good, the bad and the ugly". Also, in line with the United Arab Emirates, various initiatives on psychological well-being, the theme of this conference is global mental health. Our yearly psychology conference started in 2013 and has grown substantially in terms of the diversity of presentations and research areas ever since. Psychology has applications beyond the parameters of its own field, extending to the sectors of health and education, and it finds itself also in various social contexts. This interdisciplinary and far-reach will be illustrated by the presentations today. Research in the Middle East is growing in importance, and this has a direct influence on the continuing social and economic development of the region. Events such as this conference add significantly towards the progress of our field in this part of the world. Building on the successes of our previous eight conferences, this event promises to be an excellent forum for the dissemination of qualitative and quantitative applied research findings. On behalf of the psychology department at Middlesex University Dubai, I once again welcome you to what I am sure will be a thought-provoking and interesting event!

PROGRAMME

WELCOME ADDRESS – 10:30 – 11:00 AM
Dr. Cedwyn Fernandes, Dr. Cody Paris, Dr. Anita Kashi

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION – 11:00 – 12:00 PM
Dr. David Giofrè
Chair: Dr. Anita Kashi

ORAL PRESENTATION 1 – 12: 15 – 01:15 PM
Chair: Dr. Nishtha Lamba

PRACTITIONER SESSION – 2:00 – 3:00 PM
Chair: Mrs. Seada Kassie, Ms. Denise Andrzejewski

ORAL PRESENTATION 2– 3:15 – 4:00 PM
Chair: Dr. Lynda Hyland

WORKSHOP – 4:15 – 4:45 PM
Chair: Dr. Anita, Ms. Aditi Bhatia, Ms. Mariam Melad

CLOSING ADDRESS– 4:45 – 5:00 PM
Dr Tenia Kyriazi, Dr Anita Kashi

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Dr. David Giofrè

11:00 – 12:00 PM Session Chair – Dr. Anita Kashi

David Giofrè is an associate (tenured) professor at the University of Genoa (Italy). He graduated from Padua University (Padua, Italy), spent a period of research at the Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta, USA), and has been lecturing for several years at Liverpool John Moores University (Liverpool, UK). David has published more than 70 papers in prestigious international peer-reviewed journals. He collaborated with more than 70 co-authors around the world. He is currently interested in human intelligence, neurodevelopmental disorders, and female/male differences in intelligence and in academic achievement, among other interests.

Intelligence in children with neurodevelopmental disorders

Intelligence tests (e.g., Wechsler scales) are routinely used for the assessment and diagnosis of children with various neurodevelopmental disabilities including, but not limited to, specific learning disabilities or autism spectrum disorders. Despite being routinely used in children with various neurodevelopmental disorders, the profile of and the performance of these children is often ignored. In a series of studies, using a large sample of children, we evaluated the cognitive profile of children with various disabilities. Results showed that children with various disabilities presented with a very peculiar profile, that is a general ability index typically higher as compared to the full-scale IQ. We also demonstrated that the presence of these discrepancies between indexes can be used for diagnostic purposes. Finally, our results showed that the structure of intelligence of these children evaluated using multigroup confirmatory analyses tends to be different as compared to the structure observed in children with normal development. These results have important clinical implications, showing for example that a peculiar profile has to be expected in children with various neurodevelopmental disabilities. Results also have important theoretical implications, demonstrating for example that intelligence batteries should also be validated using a large sample of children with various neurodevelopmental disabilities.

ORAL PRESENTATION 1

Dr. Rupa Kalahasthi

12:15 – 12:35 PM Session Chair – Dr. Nishita Lamba

Dr. Rupa Kalahasthi is a clinical psychologist and an expert in the mental health vertical of the Blank Slate Project. Having completed her bachelor's degree from St. Xavier's College and master's degree from the University of Mumbai, she went on to pursue her doctorate from The George Washington University in the United States. After completing her doctorate, she returned to India to work with the underserved and create quality mental health solutions. She has expertise in using psychological assessments to establish diagnostic clarity as well as culturally adapting tools, therapies, and assessments for the Indian population. She is currently an Assistant Professor at Rochester Institute of Technology, and her major clinical and research work is focused on providing mental health care to the homeless population in India.

Exploring the mental health landscape amongst women in rural Maharashtra: A qualitative study

With mental healthcare gaining traction in developing countries such as India, a significant gap is observed between the proportion of individuals suffering from mental health-related conditions and those receiving adequate mental healthcare services, especially in rural areas. The present study explores various factors that influence this treatment gap focusing on women in rural Maharashtra. In Study 1, using a focused group discussion with 8-10 women, we explored the shared language used when discussing mental health concerns in rural Maharashtra. This informed the language used in the semi-structured interviews in Study 2, wherein we contextualized mental health concerns, needs, and gaps. An in-depth interview schedule was designed to understand women's knowledge and perception of mental health and explore language, needs, support structures, and interventions related to mental health. Here, 72 female beneficiaries of Svatantra Microfin Pvt-Ltd from the six administrative divisions of Maharashtra were recruited. The sample was representative of age and caste categories. Thematic analysis showed existing patterns in four areas: shared language; gender roles; existing infrastructure and support systems; and potential interventions. The present study acts as a building block to developing interventions for mental healthcare in rural settings and can inform actions and policies for the same.

ORAL PRESENTATION 1

Dr. Prerna Bholah

Session Chair – Dr. Nishita Lamba

12:35 – 12:55 PM

Dr. Prerna Bholah has been teaching at Middlesex University Mauritius since 2012 and is currently the Area Head of Science and Education as well as the programme coordinator for the MSc Clinical Health Psychology and well-being. Her primary research interests lie in the mechanisms underlying visual spatial attention and working memory, using a combination of behavioural and non-invasive imaging techniques such as EEG. Her recent work has focused on attentional biases to COVID-related stimuli.

Investigating Attentional Bias to COVID-19 related Stimuli in Healthy Undergraduate Students in Mauritius

The general rise in state anxiety associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has been linked to attentional biases towards negative stimuli. It was therefore important to understand the mechanisms of attentional biases towards COVID-19 related stimuli to improve mental healthcare policies and interventions. 122 participants from Middlesex University, screened free of any clinical diagnoses, participated in a lexical dot probe task which recorded their reaction times in milliseconds, whereby attentional bias levels were calculated. A 2 (Anxiety Levels: High Anxious, Low Anxious) x 2 (Lexical Stimuli Type: COVID-19-Related, Neutral) mixed factorial ANOVA was used to assess the effects of anxiety and COVID-19-related or neutral stimuli. Results showed the presence of an attentional bias in participants towards COVID-19-related stimuli. An interaction effect was also found such that highly anxious individuals showed a greater attentional bias towards COVID-19-related stimuli compared to low anxious individuals. The findings of this study can be extrapolated to clinical settings to better inform mental health interventions addressing attentional bias.

ORAL PRESENTATION 1

Dr Shervin Vencatachellum

Session Chair – Dr. Nishita Lamba

12:55 – 01:15 PM

Dr. Shervin Vencatachellum recently joined Middlesex University Mauritius as a Senior Lecturer in Psychology. He holds a Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Luxembourg, where he devised a series of pain expectancy manipulation paradigms to explore the underlying mechanisms of mindfulness. His main research interests revolve around the role of expectations, beliefs, and motivations on perception and affect. He also holds a strong interest in cognitive biases in mood and affective disorders, mindfulness, and placebo/nocebo phenomena.

Categorisation biases perception: The pervasive influence of category labels on pain reporting

The biasing influence of categorical information on perception has been well-documented across studies of visual, auditory, haptic, and social perception. Given the prevalent use of category labels in pain diagnostics, it is important to establish whether these biases also extend to the nociceptive realm. Using a recently developed pain categorization paradigm, we first tested whether providing categorical information about painful heat stimuli could significantly alter participants' perception of these stimuli. The results revealed that participants who underwent the categorization manipulation procedure reported increased perceptual similarity and higher confusion frequencies for stimuli ascribed to the same category (assimilation effect) and reduced perceptual similarity and lower confusion frequencies for stimuli ascribed to separate categories (accentuation effect), relative to a control group. Building on recent evidence suggesting that mindfulness may mitigate the influence of prior information on pain perception, we conducted a follow-up study to test whether high and low-trait mindfulness scorers differ in their susceptibility to the categorization procedure. Contrary to predictions, we failed to observe any modulatory influence of trait mindfulness level on the categorization-induced assimilation and accentuation biases. These findings raise concerns regarding the common use of pain classification labels for diagnostic purposes in clinical settings.

PRACTITIONER SESSION
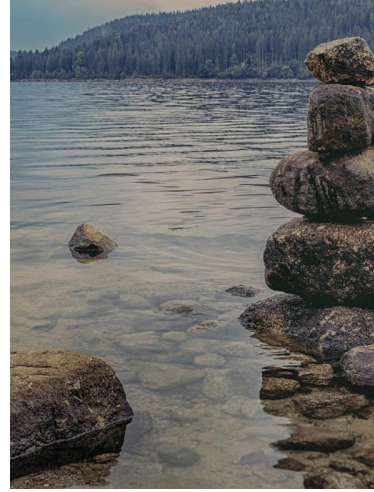
Mina Soliman
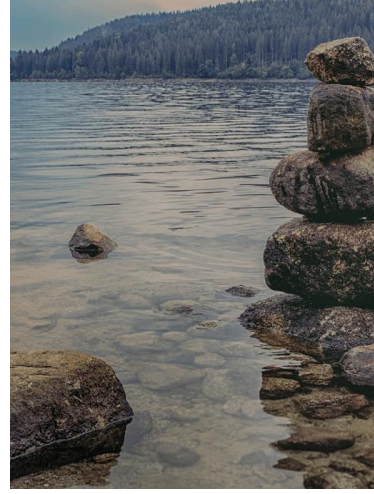
Session Chair – Ms. Seada Kassie, Ms. Denise Andrzejewski 2:00 – 2:30 PM

Mina is a clinical psychologist with over 4 years of experience. He holds a master's degree in clinical psychology from The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, USA. He is also a member of the American Psychological Association and The British Psychological Society. Mina provides therapy to ages 16 and up, ranging in various mental illnesses (depression, anxiety, schizophrenia disorders, personality disorders, drug abuse, self-harm, and more). Mina has diverse experience in mediating, intervening, and resolving issues that involve suicide ideations, domestic violence, alcohol, and drug abuse, and conflicts. Moreover, Mina follows holistic and divers' interventions including CBT, psychodynamic, trauma-focused CBT, IPSRT, psychological first aid, and systematic therapy. He is keen on providing his patients with a safe, welcoming, and non-judgmental space where they can vent and receive support.

Management of stress and anxiety

One of the most prevalent problems in the UAE is anxiety and stress. The source of anxiety is usually related to work, social circles, and relationships. As a clinical psychologist, I usually use CBT and psychodynamic approaches to identify the root causes of stress and learn behavioral techniques to adjust and thrive. However, not all factors can be in the client's control, so then the therapy would shift to more stress tolerance and learning techniques to control the stress in other factors. For example, if someone cannot control the stressful schedule of work, they can learn how to control the stressful situations in their relationships and social circles. With that, they are more capable of tolerating the stress of work, because they would feel they have support in other areas of their lives. In social circles, usually, the main source of anxiety here is low self-esteem. Therefore, I focus on how to improve self-esteem using different techniques like CBT, psychodynamics, and ACT. In relationships, the main source of stress is that couples misunderstand each other, and do not communicate properly. Thus, the aim of my couple therapy is for the couple to understand and communicate correctly; not to keep or separate themselves, this is their independent decision.

PRACTITIONER SESSION

Christine Tanner

Session Chair –Ms. Seada Kassie, Ms. Denise Andrzejewski 2:30 – 3:00 PM

Christine Tanner is a registered Health Psychologist Practitioner and Lead Psychologist who works across both the National Health Service and corporate private health care in the UK. She has worked with London commissioning boards to roll out new services for mental health across primary and secondary care. In addition, she works as a consultant to the King's Fund, London to support programmes in Leadership and Population Health. She is also an Executive Coach. She holds the title of senior Fellow at London Imperial College, undertaken through the National Institute of Health Research, and previously at Buckingham New University and London South Bank University, UK. Her research interests have included organisational, leadership and staff role development, multidisciplinary teams, ataxia, COPD, and cancer services.

Understanding neurodiversity and strategies to enhance inclusion and productivity in the workplace.

For many years neurodiversity has been insufficiently understood, stereotyped and characteristics viewed as deficiencies. Throughout educational and work settings we encounter neurodiverse and neurotypical people. Gaining an understanding of neurodiversity leads to greater inclusion for all and an increase in effective work practices. Content includes – past and current models of neurodiversity; understanding what neurodiversity is and its three categories; the main characteristics of some prevalent presentations of neurodiversity, including ADHD, ASD, Dyspraxia and Dyslexia; diversity and inclusion – why is it important; why you can't trust the data; adaptation and support strategies in a work or educational setting; getting a diagnosis or assessment; myths about therapy and demystifying the help seeking process. Attendees will gain a greater appreciation of the continuum of ways of thinking and clarity of terms and process. In addition, how supporting neurodivergences can draw on strengths which enhance creativity and productivity.

ORAL SESSION - 2

Fatema Ali

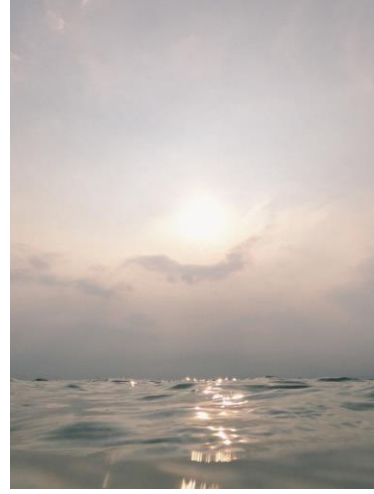Session Chair – Dr. Lynda Hyland 3:15 – 3:35 PM
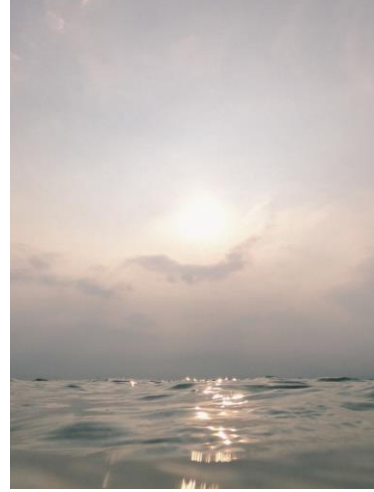
Mrs. Fatema Ali (M.Sc. in Social Psychology – Lancaster University 2010) is a lecturer in the integrated sciences department since 2007. Fatema is a certified HEA fellow - Higher education academy in the UK, a Certified specialist in scribble and drawing analysis, and an international certified trainer from Kingston Business Academy. She has a vast experience in reviewing, modifying, and teaching courses in prestigious universities in the Kingdom of Bahrain thus, has wider experience in the dissemination of knowledge in her specified discipline, as well as is exposed to students with varying backgrounds. Mrs. Fatema is interested in conducting research relating to aggression in children using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, as well as in topics relating to education and learning. Mrs. Fatema has given many workshops and training sessions to students, UoB faculty and the wider public.

Exploring Cyber-Victimisation: The social and emotional factors involved in victimisation and reporting transgression among women in the Kingdom of Bahrain

With the increase in the prevalence of using cyberspace, a dramatic rise in incidents of cybercrime followed in recent years. Being a cybercrime victim has great social and emotional consequences ranging from slight harm to trauma. Moreover, the social roles, and expectations stemming from society's values and norms might expedite the consequences of cyber-crime, especially on female victims. The aim of this paper is to explore the psychological and social factors involved in technology-facilitated violence, with emphasize on the feeling of victimization, the reporting of the crime, exploration of the emotional and mental consequences on the victim, and the adopted coping mechanisms. Data were derived from a total of 1302 participants from primary and secondary resources, using a triangulation mixed method. Analysis indicates that the culture of fear and shaming exacerbates the emotional and mental consequences of cyber-victimization and deters from reporting the incidents to either family members or the authorities. It was recommended that awareness programs should reach out to different cohorts in society to encourage the creation of a supportive society, especially for female victims.

ORAL SESSION - 2

Dr. Jigar Jogia

Session Chair – Dr. Lynda Hyland 3:35 – 3:55 PM

Dr. Jigar Jogia is a British Psychological Society Chartered Psychologist, Associate Professor of Psychology at Zayed University specializing in Mental health, Neuroscience and Cognitive psychology. He has recently led the development of a postgraduate psychology program and an undergraduate program in the UAE. He also works in industry as a Psychology & Marketing Consultant and workshop provider. Dr. Jogia was lecturing and conducting research in Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience at some of the most prestigious academic institutions in the UK including King's College, University of Birmingham, and Aston University.

When It's Not Just ADHD: Comorbidities Associated with ADHD in the UAE

Previous research has revealed high rates of neurodevelopmental and psychiatric comorbid conditions among individuals diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). However, research on this topic in the Middle East has been limited. This study evaluates the medical, neurodevelopmental, and psychiatric comorbidities in children and adolescents diagnosed with ADHD. Data from a tertiary care setting in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) will highlight insights into the most common comorbid conditions among children. Predictors of comorbidity and functional outcomes and the effectiveness of psychotherapeutic interventions for children and adolescents with ADHD will be discussed.

WORKSHOP SESSION

Dr. Anita Kashi, Aditi Bhatia, Mariam
Melad 4:15 – 4:45 PM

Stress – The good, the bad, and the ugly

While some amount of stress is necessary for our functioning, excessive stress is one of the leading causes of mental health problems, work-related exhaustion, and cardiac illnesses. It is important for your health to find the optimal level of stress that you can learn to manage effectively. This workshop will dive into all the topics of 'Stress' in detail and discuss strategies for stress management. We will also address how we can maintain a good work-life balance and prevent stress from having a negative effect on our lives.