



University Campus **Oldham**

Higher Education at Oldham College

SPRING

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Editorial

This 9th issue of Spark includes research and scholarly activities undertaken at University Campus Oldham (UCO) and Oldham College (OC) over the last academic year. This publication includes academic posters, reflections, summaries and creative projects from a range of subject-specialist areas. You will find elements of Oldham College's strategic plan (2024-27) running through this publication. Guided by the four strategic pillars, this publication reflects an ethos that puts students at its heart by inspiring learning, empowers people through continuous growth, cultivates a place that sparks innovation and learning, and works in partnership to elevate student potential.

In June 2025 we celebrated our annual UCO Research and Scholarly Activity Symposium. The keynote speaker was Dr David Cooper, from Manchester Metropolitan University and co-director of the Centre for Place Writing. The keynote provided an engaging and inspiring discussion on Place Matters: Creative Approaches to Reading & Writing, Research & Teaching. The annual UCO Research Subject Showcase was held in the afternoon of the symposium. All attendees were invited to an exhibition that showcased research undertaken by UCO staff and students. Attendees could network, visit multiple projects and engage in discussions. The research presented covered a range of subject specialisms and research methodologies.

This year's publication includes an exploration of the acceptance of generative AI in Higher Education and investigates the silent wounds of toxic femininity through a therapeutic lens. Additionally, there is a selection of work that demonstrates a range of research projects by staff and students from across several disciplines at UCO and OC.

We hope you enjoy learning more about the wide range of research activities undertaken at University Campus Oldham and Oldham College, please join us at our next annual UCO Research Symposium. If you would like to present your own research for publication or if you would like to be involved in a research project, please get in touch.

Donna Sinclair

Chair of the UCO Research and Scholarly Activity Group

SPARK Magazine 2026

Cover Designs

Submissions from BA (Hons) Graphic Design Year Two students and BA (Hons) Illustration Year Two students.

For the third consecutive year, students from the Graphic Design and Illustration degree courses at University Campus Oldham were set the challenge of creating the front cover of this year's SPARK magazine as a live project within their Professional Practice module.

The students were given the brief to focus on either the title of the journal or the subject of research and produce cover designs that captured this in whatever medium they decided best suited their ideas.

A final shortlist of five designs was selected, with the winning design chosen by members of the UCO Research and Scholarly Activity Group.

Thank you to all the students and Brandon Thomas, Professional Practice Module Lead, for all their hard work.

hard work.

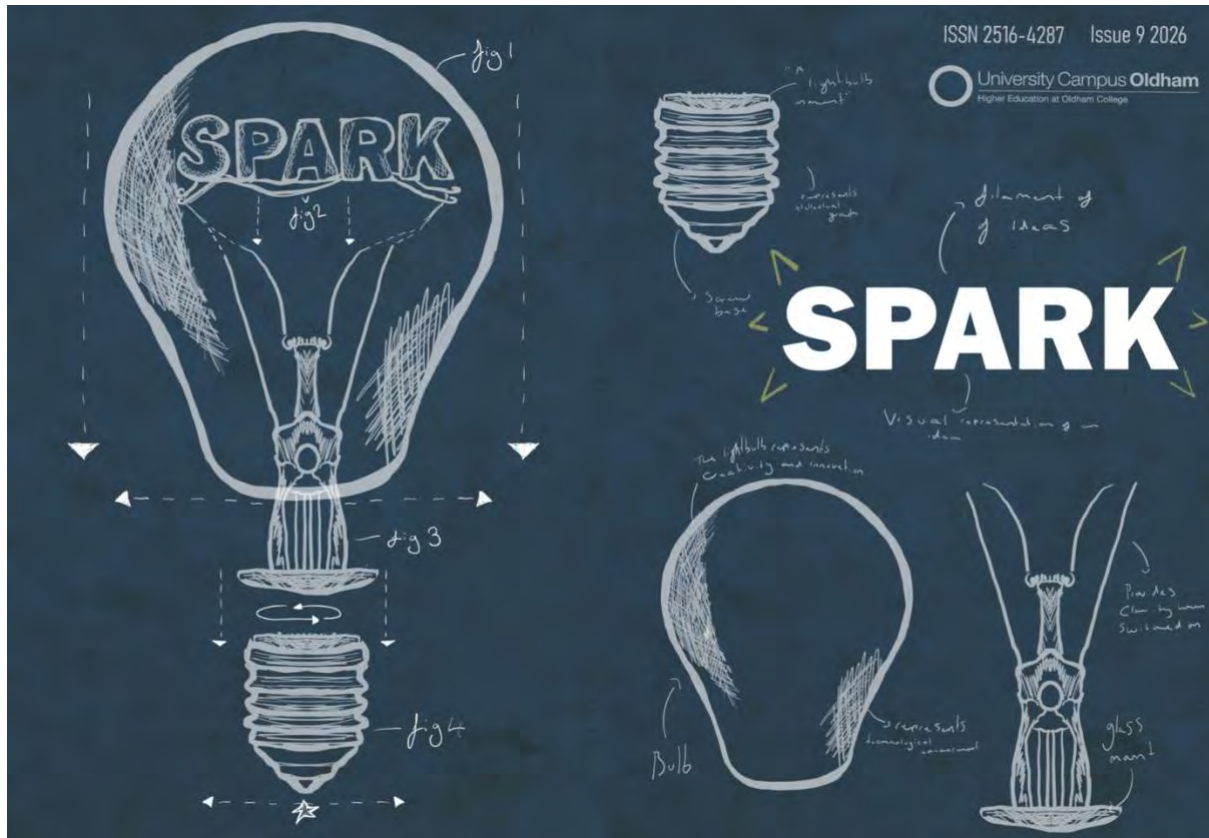




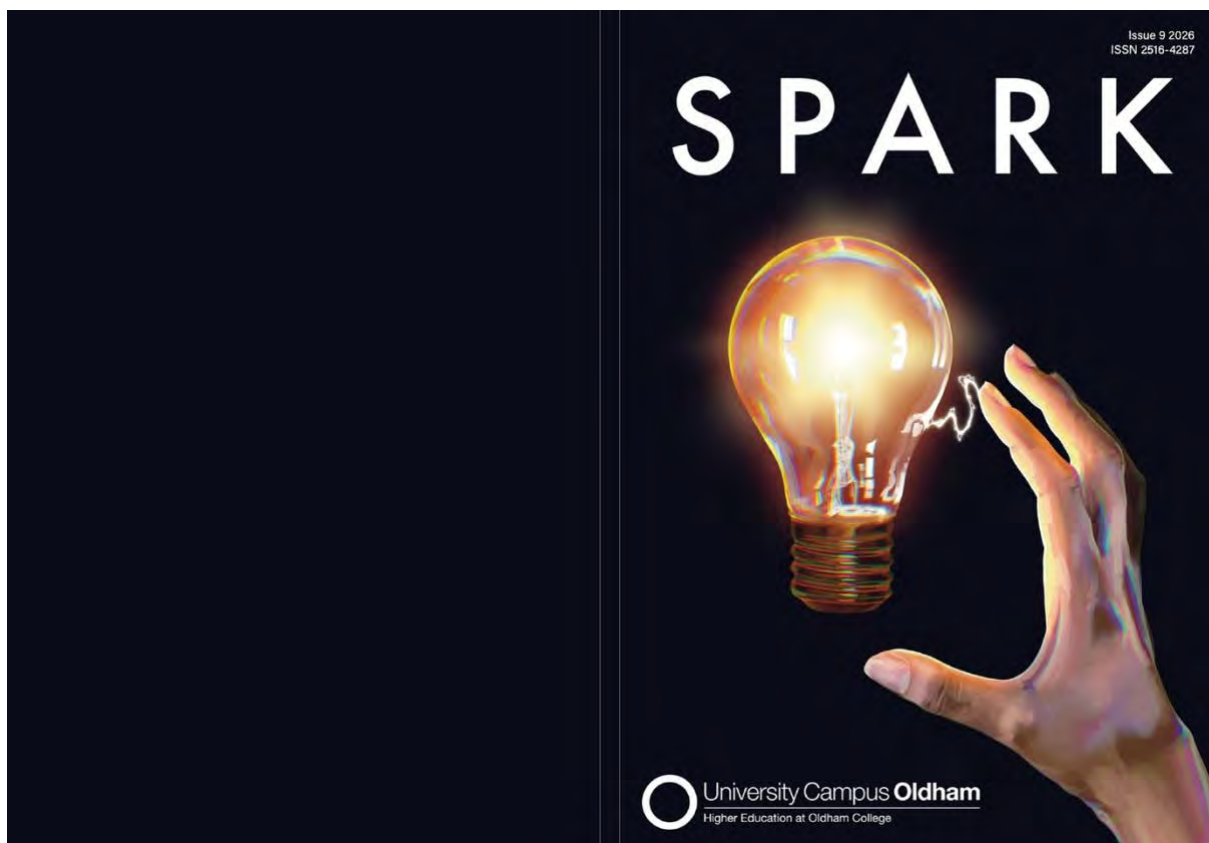
Shortlisted Cover: Lucy Fountain



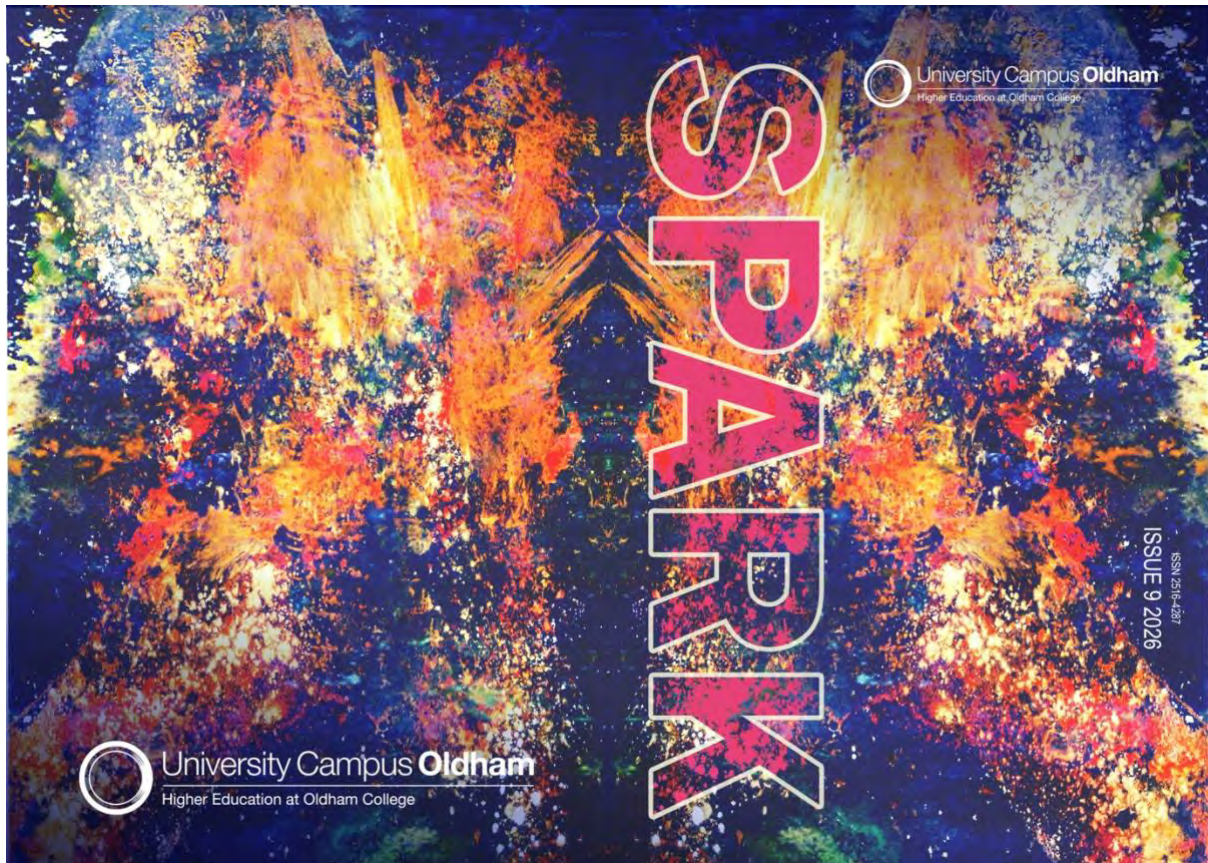
Shortlisted Cover: Kai Ghazi



Third Place Cover: Delta Brooks



Second Place Cover: Hope Naisbit



Winning Cover Design: Isobel Warren



Exploring Acceptance of Generative Artificial Intelligence in a Higher Education in a Further Education Environment

By Amy Woolley

Abstract

This research explores Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) acceptance among Higher Education lecturers working within Further Education contexts (HE in FE), addressing a significant gap in educational technology literature. Employing an interpretivist epistemological framework, the study utilises the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) to understand GAI adoption patterns in this under-researched educational environment. Semi-structured interviews with three lecturers were conducted, with data analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2022) thematic analysis framework. Five key themes emerged: AI as a Catalyst, Conditional Trust in AI, Human Expertise as Irreplaceable, Institutional Lag and Informality, and Student Use and Misuse of AI. Findings reveal that lecturers employ GAI strategically for lesson planning, content generation, and pedagogical adaptation while maintaining professional authority over teaching practice. The research identifies conditional trust as a critical factor and suggests Professional Identity Threat as a novel construct extending UTAUT2's explanatory power in educational contexts.

1. Introduction

The contemporary educational landscape is experiencing unprecedented technological transformation, with education and technology becoming increasingly intertwined (Hrastinski et al., 2019). Within this evolving context, Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) has emerged as a particularly significant force. Lodge et al. (2023) propose that Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT are positioned to fundamentally transform educational frameworks. Bonner et al. (2023) describe the operational mechanics; users provide input through prompts to which the LLM generates responses, representing a fundamental departure from traditional educational technologies.

The rapid adoption of AI across disciplines presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly as it extends beyond traditional STEM fields into academia, where Shata and Hartley (2025) contend that educators may have limited understanding of underlying technological mechanisms. Jandrić (2021) suggests that AI's generative unpredictability fundamentally challenges empiricist approaches to educational research; while each AI interaction produces

contextually situated, subjective outputs that resist standardisation, educational institutions maintain positivist expectations of consistency and objectivity.

This study addresses the following research questions: (1) How are HE lecturers currently using GAI technologies in their teaching practice? (2) What are the perceived benefits and limitations of using AI in teaching practice? (3) What are HE teachers' opinions of the use of AI in practice? (4) Is GAI use supported at an institutional level?

2. Literature Review

2.1 AI Adoption in Educational Contexts

There is growing consensus that AI is changing the education sector (Maslej et al., 2025; Hrastinski et al., 2019). Ocen et al. (2025) state that AI is widely used across HE to improve teaching practices, supported by Crompton and Burke's (2023) assertion that Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIED) research has seen a recent surge. Eager and Brunton (2023) maintain that integrating AI into HE will keep the sector relevant and sustainable, whilst Nagy et al. (2024) agree that institutions need flexibility in their adoption of AI. However, Slimi (2023) argues that the emergence of AI technologies has implications beyond those impacting organisations; students, teachers, policy makers and other stakeholders will be affected.

2.2 UTAUT2 Framework

The UTAUT2 framework (Venkatesh et al., 2012) was selected as the primary theoretical model over TAM and TPACK. TAM's focus solely on ease of use and usefulness was considered insufficient for GAI contexts where trust plays a pivotal role (Al-Abdullatif, 2024). TPACK's emphasis on pedagogical redesign does not align with this study's focus on adoption behaviours; moreover, TPACK ignores wider cultural and organisational factors (Al-Abdullatif, 2024), considered important given the niche educational setting.

UTAUT2 comprises seven primary constructs: Performance Expectancy (perceived utility for task-specific improvements), Effort Expectancy (perceived burden of adoption), Social Influence (normative pressures from peers and hierarchies), Facilitating Conditions (infrastructure and support mechanisms), Hedonic Motivation (intrinsic enjoyment), Price Value (perceived worth relative to cost), and Habit (established behavioural patterns). Gansser and Reich (2021) postulate that the evolution from UTAUT to UTAUT2 represents a significant theoretical advancement, particularly relevant to contemporary voluntary technology adoption scenarios. Recent applications include Xu et al. (2024) and Acosta-Enriquez et al. (2024), who argue UTAUT2 is particularly appropriate for university educational environments.

Despite its widespread application, UTAUT2 faces critiques. Tamilmani et al. (2021) criticise its lack of longitudinal research and insufficient parsimony. Gansser and Reich (2021) note it does

not adequately address policy, training, and compliance factors relevant in organisational educational settings. Whilst studies such as Li (2025) and Wu et al. (2022) have employed UTAUT or its extensions to evaluate AI-related behaviours, Du and Beibei (2024) maintain that fewer studies centre specifically on AI use in educational contexts.

2.3 HE in FE Context and Research Gap

This research is situated within a HE in FE environment characterised by a distinctive institutional structure wherein curriculum planning is undertaken by partner institutions whilst individual lecturers retain pedagogical autonomy. Tucker et al. (2020) identify distinguishing characteristics of College Based Higher Education (CBHE): smaller class sizes, enhanced interpersonal contact, location within smaller towns, lower tuition fees attracting students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and higher proportions of mature students with extracurricular commitments. These contextual factors may influence GAI adoption patterns substantially compared to traditional HEIs.

The research gap is well-established. Alhwaiti (2023) proposes that AI's exponential progression demands continuous investigation. Although the UK ranks amongst the highest global contributors to AI development (Maslej et al., 2025), Karan and Chakma (2025) identify significant lag in institutional incorporation. Zaim et al. (2024) argue that research focusing on HE lecturer perspectives is significantly underrepresented, with existing studies concentrating on student experiences. Kadi-Hanifi (2020) mandates further research specifically within CBHE settings, and Chiu (2024) mandates research focusing specifically on educator contexts.

3. Methodology

This study adopts an interpretivist epistemological framework, recognising that knowledge about GAI adoption is socially constructed through educators' lived experiences and meaning-making processes. Drawing on Schutz's (1967) social phenomenology, this research prioritises *verstehen* over objective measurement, acknowledging that GAI adoption is embedded within specific institutional and cultural contexts. The researcher's insider-researcher status (Mercer, 2007) conferred methodological and practical benefits whilst posing risks to objectivity requiring careful management. Rigour was addressed through Toma's (2011) interpretivist criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection method, well-suited to research contexts presenting unanticipated perspectives (Creswell & Guetterman, 2024). An interview schedule comprising four open-ended questions guided sessions conducted in person and recorded for transcription. Participant recruitment was initiated during a CPD session on GAI applications delivered to 23 academic staff at a university centre operating within an FE college in North West England, hosting approximately 35 lecturers and 550 students. Three participants

were purposively selected to reflect a range of subject specialisms and demographic characteristics, aligning with moderators identified by Venkatesh et al. (2012) as modified by Hu et al. (2020). Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2022) six-phase thematic analysis framework. Coding was conducted manually to enable close engagement with textual data. The analysis was conducted by the researcher alone, providing interpretive consistency but potentially limiting alternative analytical perspectives. Comprehensive ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, with particular care taken to protect confidentiality given the small institutional setting and insider-researcher dynamic.

4. Findings

Thematic analysis identified twelve initial codes consolidated into five themes: four central themes (AI as a Catalyst, Conditional Trust in AI, Human Expertise as Irreplaceable, Institutional Lag and Informality) and one contextual theme (Student Use and Misuse of AI).

4.1 AI as a Catalyst

This theme comprises timesaving, creativity boosting, and pedagogical flexibility codes. All participants identified significant time savings, particularly in planning. Participant 1 noted its value "especially in planning, especially toward the end of the year". Participants reported GAI served as an effective stimulus for creative thinking; Participant 1 described "It just kicks your brain into touch really", whilst Participant 2 noted that even unused outputs sparked alternative approaches. The data also revealed enhanced pedagogical adaptability, with GAI supporting differentiation and responsive lesson adaptation. Participants expressed enthusiasm linking to the Hedonic Motivation construct, with Participant 1 commenting "I love the one that makes songs up, which makes it a little bit fun."

4.2 Conditional Trust in AI

This theme incorporates AI literacy, ethical concerns, and over-reliance worries. Participant 1 described initial scepticism due to "horror stories" about reliability, whilst Participant 2 noted a trial-and-error learning process. All participants emphasised verification and maintaining authenticity; Participant 3 expressed awareness of a "barrier" about using AI-generated content without personalisation. Concerns about excessive dependence were prominent, with Participant 1 emphasising "I just don't want to become over reliable on it" and Participant 3 acknowledging using AI only at a basic level despite recognising greater potential.

4.3 Human Expertise as Irreplaceable

Participants articulated clear convictions about unique human contributions. Participant 3 emphasised the irreplaceable nature of personal anecdotes and experiences, noting that AI cannot replicate "wit or the sarcasm or the clever thinking or the human element." Underlying

professional identity concerns were evident; Participant 1 initially worried that using AI might suggest insufficient knowledge, whilst Participant 3 raised concerns that AI accessibility might lead students to question the value of formal qualifications.

4.4 Institutional Lag and Informality

Participants consistently reported absence of formal guidance regarding GAI use. In the absence of structured support, participants relied on informal peer networks for learning and validation, demonstrating Social Influence mechanisms within UTAUT2. Participants demonstrated limited awareness of available platforms. Financial constraints emerged as a significant limitation linking to the Price Value construct, with participants noting reliance on free tools whilst expressing desire for institutionally funded subscriptions.

4.5 Student Use and Misuse of AI

This contextual theme emerged from all participants' repeated references to student AI behaviours. Concerns centred on academic integrity, with participants identifying detection of AI-generated submissions and noting students' lack of sophisticated GAI literacy skills. Participant 3 highlighted the complexity of defining appropriate use, particularly in creative disciplines where the boundary between AI-assisted and self-created work is ambiguous.

5. Discussion

The data demonstrates comprehensive GAI integration across lesson planning, content generation, and resource creation, establishing GAI as a pedagogical support tool rather than a replacement mechanism. Participants exhibited both proactive usage for enhanced creativity and flexibility, and reactive deployment for unexpected workload management. Benefits centred on increasing efficiency rather than pedagogical transformation, whilst limitations were more affective than practical, with participants citing cautious optimism and unease.

AI as a Catalyst emerged as the most salient theme, strongly linking to Performance Expectancy—the strongest predictor of behavioural intention in UTAUT2 (Venkatesh et al., 2012). Participants' emphasis on efficiency aligns with Bonner et al. (2023), who document GAI's ability to quickly summarise and differentiate content. Additional connections to Hedonic Motivation through expressed enjoyment suggest intrinsic motivation may reinforce utilitarian benefits. The adaptability enabled by GAI reflects Shahzad et al.'s (2024) findings on AI's inclusivity potential.

Conditional Trust links strongly to Effort Expectancy, as participants discussed skill levels and time constraints as barriers to AI literacy. Sperling et al. (2024) contend that AI literacy in teaching centres on the ability to command AI effectively and critically evaluate output rather than understanding underlying mechanisms, supported by Long et al. (2021). Ethical concerns included GAI's unpredictable output and bias replication (Jandrić, 2021), alongside transparency

issues regarding training datasets (DSIT, 2024). Over-reliance concerns reflect broader professional anxieties, with Yu (2023) warning that overreliance can deskill professionals. Although ethical concerns lack direct UTAUT2 constructs, research including Eneizan et al. (2019) and Martins et al. (2014) integrates Perceived Risk as an additional component, mapping directly to conditional trust themes.

The theme of Human Expertise as Irreplaceable is supported by Mikroyannidis et al. (2024), who found human-authored planning was preferred over AI for accuracy and comprehensiveness, with participants arguing AI remains unsuitable for autonomous content creation. Professional identity concerns reflect broader discourse, with Jones (2020) noting teacher identity is fluid and shaped by political, social, and economic factors. This creates indirect pressure where lecturers may feel organisational pressure to use AI whilst this conflicts with personal values, linking to Social Influence within UTAUT2.

Institutional Lag and Informality demonstrates strong links to both Social Influence and Facilitating Conditions. Participants' experiences of unclear guidance align with Bobula (2024), who emphasises that guidance should exist for staff, not only students. The need for structured professional development reflects Lan's (2024) emphasis on its necessity, whilst Shata and Hartley (2025) note AI's rapidly changing nature makes forming best practice advice particularly challenging. Student Use and Misuse connects to Social Influence, where student adoption behaviours may create normative pressures affecting lecturer attitudes, as documented by Gonsalves (2025).

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The standard UTAUT2 framework assumes that increased Performance Expectancy leads to increased adoption (Venkatesh et al., 2003). However, this relationship may be more complex with AI technologies. Ackerhans et al. (2025) found professional identity threat acted as a negative mediator in AI adoption in healthcare contexts, indicating Performance Expectancy may be context-dependent. The current research provides mixed evidence; whilst all participants expressed concerns about professional relevance, they simultaneously emphasised the human element as irreplaceable. This apparent contradiction suggests professional identity threat may be a nuanced construct mediated by multiple factors. Theoretical modification is therefore suggested to incorporate Professional Identity Threat as a distinct construct within UTAUT2, though further empirical validation with larger samples is required.

5.2 Practical Implications

The data clearly indicates desire for institutions to embrace AI and provide further guidance and training. Participants would be receptive to institutional investment in AI tool subscriptions, though current workloads do not allow time for building individual AI literacy skills. This relates to Effort Expectancy, Facilitating Conditions, and Price Value constructs, suggesting improvements in these areas would accelerate adoption. This is supported by Wu et al. (2025), who advocate for HEIs to improve infrastructure and policies whilst increasing publicity and

guidance through formal training.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

This research acknowledges several limitations. The insider-researcher position represents a potential source of unconscious bias (Mercer, 2007). The small sample size of three participants, compounded by the absence of a male participant with digital teaching specialism, limits the robustness of findings. Venkatesh et al. (2003) assert that gender moderates technology acceptance responses, and a larger, more diverse sample would enable more robust analysis. The contemporary nature of GAI adoption presents additional contextual limitations; O'Dea and O'Dea (2023) argue that despite claims AI will revolutionise teaching, evidence of genuine pedagogical impact remains limited.

Future research directions include subject-specific investigations of GAI use, exploration of the relationship between GAI adoption and professional identity, and examination of how HE in FE student demographics influence adoption patterns. The theoretical suggestion of Professional Identity Threat as a UTAUT2 extension warrants empirical validation, particularly within AIED contexts. Additionally, incorporating TPACK in future studies focusing on pedagogical redesign could examine how educators develop competency at the intersection of technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge.

6. Conclusion

This research explored lecturer GAI acceptance within the distinctive context of HE in FE environments. Through semi-structured interviews with three participants, the study illuminated critical dimensions of GAI adoption, revealing that whilst established frameworks possess inherent value, they exhibit limited explanatory power when applied to AI in education without modification. The thematic analysis yielded four central themes effectively mapping onto UTAUT2 constructs whilst revealing areas requiring enhancement. AI as a Catalyst aligns with Performance Expectancy and Hedonic Motivation; Conditional Trust maps onto Effort Expectancy and an emergent Perceived Risk construct; Human Expertise as Irreplaceable highlights a novel Professional Identity Threat dimension; and Institutional Lag connects to Social Influence and Facilitating Conditions.

The emergence of Professional Identity Threat as a distinct concern represents a dimension of technology acceptance particularly salient in contexts where AI capabilities overlap with core professional competencies. Within the HE in FE context, the study found that GAI implementation remains largely at individual practitioners' discretion, creating both opportunities for contextually responsive implementation and risks of inequalities in student experiences. The research contributes original insights into this under-researched educational setting and provides a foundation for future empirical validation of the proposed UTAUT2 extension.

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The Silent Wounds of Toxic Femininity – A Therapeutic Lens

By Tasnim Masuma BSc (Hons) Counselling & Psychotherapeutic Skills

Introduction

Despite widespread narratives of female empowerment, the internalisation of patriarchal norms remains deeply embedded across cultural and racial lines. These norms shape how women understand themselves, relate to others, and respond to harm, often promoting silence, endurance, and self-blame. In therapeutic contexts, such internalised scripts frequently accompany experiences of abuse, shaping how survivors understand their pain and encouraging responsibility to be directed inward (Robinson et al., 2024). As a result, women may struggle to name abuse, question their own credibility, or frame their experiences through moral self-critique (Abdul-Hamid, 2021). This article situates toxic femininity as a central mechanism within this silencing, operating through internalised norms of emotional repression, compliance, and self-blame. Toxic femininity operates as a form of gendered conditioning that promotes compliance, self-sacrifice, and shame while discouraging resistance and self-advocacy. Although trauma-informed approaches offer critical insight into survivors' coping strategies, they do not consistently engage with the cultural scripts shaping women's self-perception and recovery (Molinar, 2023). Findings from this study suggest that unexamined toxic femininity can inadvertently reinforce shame, silence, and self-blame in therapeutic spaces.

Context and Conceptual Framework

Gendered Socialisation and Psychological Impact

Sexual violence remains widespread and deeply underreported in the UK. Rape Crisis England & Wales (2023) report that one in four women experience rape or sexual assault in their lifetime, yet Office for National Statistics (2023) report that the majority of survivors do not disclose their experiences, with shame cited as a primary barrier. These figures reflect a cultural context in which women's suffering is frequently silenced, minimised, or reframed as personal responsibility. This study positions toxic femininity as a central mechanism within this silencing, understood as the internalisation of gendered norms that promote emotional repression, compliance, and self-blame.

Femininity is socially constructed through expectations that encourage women to prioritise relational harmony, suppress emotional expression, and derive self-worth through care and self-sacrifice (Gilligan, 1982; Littrell & Bertsch, 2013). Kohlberg's (1984) justice-oriented model, which privileges autonomy and rule-based morality, reflects gendered assumptions that position women's relational orientation as secondary, while Gilligan (1982) argues that women's moral development is shaped through social expectations of care, often at the expense of personal boundaries. Kandiyoti's (1988) concept of patriarchal bargaining further highlights how women may internalise restrictive norms as adaptive strategies for navigating unequal power structures.

Within this framework, emotional endurance is frequently moralised, and resistance framed as selfish or disruptive. Survivors who assert needs, express anger, or seek justice may experience guilt or fear social sanction, having internalised beliefs that silence is virtuous (Aakvaag et al., 2016). These dynamics are amplified within patriarchal religious and cultural systems where femininity is equated with obedience, purity, and endurance (Fivush, 2010; Heron et al., 2022). In honour-based contexts, silence is often enforced not only by men, but by women socialised into the same systems, resulting in survivors being blamed, punished, or excluded (Aplin, 2017; Bhanbhro et al., 2016).

The psychological and physical consequences of this conditioning are significant. Maté (2019) links chronic emotional repression to long-term illness, noting that women are disproportionately affected by stress-related and autoimmune conditions. While women are more likely than men to seek psychological support (Mental Health Foundation, 2023), therapeutic approaches that overlook gendered socialisation risk reinforcing the very patterns of suppression that contribute to distress. These pressures are further intensified by the commodification of femininity, where capitalist and digital cultures promote self-surveillance, appearance-based worth, and emotional containment (McRobbie, 2009; Laughter et al., 2023). The prevalence of eating disorders among girls and women reflects the embodied cost of these intersecting pressures (NHS England, 2023; Fixsen, 2024).

Victim-Blaming, Shame, and Moral Policing

Victim-blaming remains deeply embedded in patriarchal ideology, framing sexual violence as a consequence of women's behaviour rather than male aggression. The Madonna-Whore complex (Freud, 1922) offers a critical lens for understanding how women are categorised as either morally pure or deviant, with those perceived to transgress the "good girl" ideal subjected to heightened blame and disbelief (Dworkin, 1987). These contradictory expectations—demanding modesty while rewarding desirability—create double binds that deepen shame and inhibit disclosure (Allen & Green-Barteet, 2023).

Crucially, research demonstrates that responses to initial disclosure are pivotal. Negative reactions, particularly from loved ones, significantly fracture self-perception and exacerbate shame (Ahrens, 2006). Maternal responses are especially influential, as mothers may transmit gendered survival strategies rooted in their own socialisation (Miller & Dwyer, 1997).

In attempting to protect daughters from scrutiny or harm, mothers may inadvertently reinforce the notion that women are responsible for preventing male violence (Mendes et al., 2009). In honour-based societies, this policing may be enacted to preserve family status, framing sexual violence as personal failure rather than systemic injustice (Perelberg & Miller, 2011).

Shame functions as a powerful mechanism of social regulation, discouraging disclosure and reinforcing self-silencing (Mardorossian, 2014). Survivors who internalise blame are more likely to experience diminished self-worth, avoidance behaviours, and prolonged trauma symptoms, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Kline et al., 2018; Bhuptani & Messman-Moore, 2019). Such responses are rooted in deeply embedded cultural messages that position women as morally accountable for harm inflicted upon them (Wilson et al., 2022).

Women Policing Women: Internalised Misogyny and Defensive Attribution

Internalised misogyny plays a central role in sustaining gender hierarchies, often manifesting through intra-gender policing around sexuality, appearance, and emotional expression (Soule & Francisco, 2023). Women may regulate one another's behaviour as a means of securing social approval or perceived safety, reflecting the underlying belief that conformity offers protection from harm (Jeffreys, 2005; Szymanski et al., 2009).

These dynamics are particularly visible in online platforms, where social media intensifies surveillance and peer regulation through influencer culture and respectability politics (Duffy & Hund, 2015). Tropes such as the "cool girl" or "not like other girls" reward women for distancing themselves from collective resistance in pursuit of male validation (Agustin, 2021; Rosida et al., 2022). Such self-policing is underpinned by the false promise that adherence to patriarchal norms can prevent violence (Gurley & Pfeifer, 2016).

Defensive Attribution Theory further explains how women may blame survivors as a means of denying shared vulnerability and maintaining an illusion of control (Brown, 2019; Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2017; 2019). In doing so, responsibility is displaced onto individual women rather than systemic conditions, reinforcing cycles of shame and isolation (Rottweiler et al., 2024). Survivors who internalise these messages are more likely to experience prolonged distress and barriers to seeking support (Anderson & Overby, 2020).

Therapy, Gendered Transference, and the Limits of Trauma Work

Toxic femininity frequently surfaces in therapeutic settings, yet many therapeutic models lack the language to explicitly name or address it. Survivors may present as compliant or high-functioning while struggling with assertiveness, anger, or boundary-setting (Smith et al., 2000). Gendered transference can further complicate this work, as shame, maternal dynamics, or fears of judgement may be projected onto female therapists, potentially evoking parallel countertransference responses.

Without a feminist and reflexive lens, therapists may inadvertently collude with these scripts by validating endurance, avoiding confrontation, or overlooking gendered dynamics altogether. Naming toxic femininity within therapy can disrupt shame and reframe distress as a response to systemic conditioning rather than personal failure. As Gilligan (1982) and Knudson-Martin (2015) argue, healing requires the disruption of power imbalances, not merely emotional containment. Therapy that affirms anger, assertiveness, and boundary-setting as legitimate responses to harm is essential for survivor agency and recovery. While feminist and trauma-informed perspectives address many of these dynamics independently, their intersection within clinical practice remains under-theorised. This gap leaves practitioners under-resourced and survivors navigating recovery within frameworks that may inadvertently replicate the norms they are attempting to unlearn. Addressing toxic femininity within therapy is therefore essential for liberatory practice.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative design to explore therapists' perspectives on how toxic femininity manifests within therapeutic work with survivors of abuse. Four counselling professionals with experience of working in trauma-informed contexts participated in the study. Participants were recruited through professional networks using purposive sampling.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, conducted either online or face-to-face. Interviews focused on therapists' observations of gendered self-blame, silence, relational dynamics, and how femininity appeared to shape clients' engagement with therapy. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of shared patterns across participants' accounts. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and all participants provided informed consent. Pseudonyms were used throughout to protect confidentiality.

Findings

Internalised Shame, Silence, and Self-Blame

Across all interviews, therapists consistently described internalised shame and self-blame as central features in women's therapeutic presentations following experiences of abuse. Participants observed that many women entered therapy already holding themselves responsible for the harm they had experienced, often minimising abuse or framing it as a consequence of personal failure rather than violence or coercion. This self-directed blame was frequently accompanied by difficulty naming abuse explicitly, with survivors using euphemistic language or questioning whether their experiences were "serious enough" to warrant distress.

Therapists noted that silence often functioned as a learned survival strategy rather than avoidance. Several participants described how women appeared highly articulate, reflective, and emotionally attuned to others, yet struggled to express anger, assert needs, or take up space within the therapeutic relationship. Emotional restraint was commonly framed by clients as strength or maturity, while distress was reframed as something to be endured privately.

Shame emerged as a pervasive emotional undercurrent shaping how survivors related to themselves and to therapy. Participants described how shame manifested through apologising for emotional expression, downplaying pain, or expressing concern about being “too much.” In several cases, therapists observed that clients monitored their own emotional responses closely, fearing judgement or rejection if they appeared angry, demanding, or visibly affected. This internal surveillance often limited disclosure and slowed therapeutic progress, particularly in early sessions.

Importantly, therapists identified that self-blame and silence were frequently reinforced by clients’ relational histories. Participants described patterns in which women had previously received dismissive or blaming responses when disclosing abuse, particularly from family members or significant others. These experiences appeared to solidify beliefs that speaking out would lead to further harm, disbelief, or relational loss. As a result, many clients arrived in therapy already primed to anticipate judgement, even within a supportive therapeutic environment.

Therapists also noted that internalised shame was not confined to narratives about abuse itself but extended to broader aspects of identity. Women frequently expressed moral self-critique, questioning their character, boundaries, or worthiness of care. Several participants observed that clients framed recovery as something they needed to “earn” through emotional restraint, compliance, or self-improvement, rather than as a response to injustice. This positioning placed responsibility for healing firmly on the survivor, reinforcing cycles of self-surveillance and emotional suppression.

Overall, this theme highlights how internalised shame, silence, and self-blame shaped women’s engagement with therapy. Rather than presenting as overt distress, these dynamics often appeared through compliance, emotional containment, and self-criticism. Therapists consistently described the challenge of working with clients whose suffering was rendered invisible by their own internalised narratives, underscoring the subtle but powerful ways toxic femininity operated within therapeutic spaces.

Gender Policing and Regulation of Feminine Propriety

A second theme captured how women’s experiences of abuse were shaped by gendered expectations regarding morality, sexuality, and respectability. Therapists described how survivors frequently evaluated themselves against narrow ideals of feminine propriety, often informed by cultural narratives that distinguish between virtuous and deviant femininity.

Participants noted that clients who perceived themselves as having transgressed expectations around modesty, sexuality, or relational behaviour were particularly vulnerable to self-blame.

Several therapists referenced patterns consistent with the Madonna–Whore framework (Freud, 1922), describing how survivors positioned themselves as either “deserving” or “undeserving” of care based on perceived moral worth. Women who fell outside socially sanctioned ideals—whether through sexual expression, relationship choices, or perceived assertiveness—were more likely to question their credibility or minimise harm. This internal moral assessment frequently intensified shame and inhibited disclosure.

Gender policing was described as occurring not only externally but interpersonally, particularly through other women. Participants noted how survivors often recalled judgement or blame from female family members, peers, or community figures. These responses were frequently framed as protective or pragmatic yet appeared to reinforce the belief that women are responsible for preventing harm through compliance and self-regulation. Therapists observed that such dynamics were especially pronounced in culturally or religiously conservative contexts, where silence and endurance were equated with respectability.

Therapists also described how broader cultural narratives—such as being “not like other girls” or distancing oneself from women perceived as careless—shaped survivors’ self-understanding. These narratives appeared to offer a false sense of safety, suggesting that conformity could prevent victimisation. When abuse occurred despite such conformity, survivors often experienced profound disorientation, shame, and self-critique.

Therapeutic Encounters with Toxic Femininity

The third theme focused on how toxic femininity entered the therapeutic relationship itself. Therapists consistently described encountering clients who appeared compliant, emotionally contained, or “high-functioning,” while struggling with assertiveness, anger, or boundary-setting. Participants noted that these presentations were often interpreted positively within broader social contexts, masking significant internal distress.

Several therapists highlighted the role of gendered transference in shaping therapeutic dynamics. Survivors frequently projected fears of judgement, shame, or maternal criticism onto female therapists, particularly when discussing sexuality, anger, or perceived moral failure. Participants described moments where clients appeared to seek approval, reassurance, or permission to express distress, reflecting deeply ingrained expectations around femininity and authority.

Therapists also reflected on the emotional demands these dynamics placed on practitioners. Participants acknowledged the potential for countertransference, particularly when therapists themselves had been socialised into similar norms of care, endurance, or emotional restraint.

Without explicit frameworks to name toxic femininity, some described uncertainty about when to challenge self-blame or how to avoid inadvertently reinforcing compliance.

Importantly, therapists noted that naming these dynamics within therapy often created shifts in clients' self-understanding. When self-blame and silence were reframed as socially conditioned responses rather than personal failures, clients appeared more able to externalise responsibility and experiment with assertiveness. However, participants emphasised that this work required reflexivity and confidence, particularly in the absence of formal training or shared professional language for addressing toxic femininity. As a result, while acts of resistance were already occurring within therapeutic practice, they often remained isolated and informal, limiting their capacity to influence training, policy, or collective change.

Discussion

The findings highlight how internalised shame, gender policing, and relational dynamics do not simply shape survivors' experiences of violence but continue to operate within therapeutic spaces themselves. Taken together, the themes demonstrate that toxic femininity functions as both a survival strategy and a silencing mechanism, shaping how women understand harm, engage with therapy, and access recovery.

Across participants' accounts, internalised shame and self-blame emerged as central barriers to therapeutic engagement. Survivors frequently positioned responsibility inward, framing abuse through moral self-critique rather than injustice. This aligns with feminist scholarship identifying self-silencing as a socially conditioned response to gendered expectations of endurance and emotional restraint. When silence is rewarded as maturity and compliance is framed as strength, distress becomes something to be managed privately rather than expressed relationally. In therapy, this presented as compliance, emotional containment, and minimisation – responses that can be interpreted as resilience or readiness for change in the absence of a critical gendered lens.

The findings also illuminate how gendered moral frameworks continue to regulate women's self-perception following abuse. Narratives consistent with the Madonna-Whore dichotomy (Freud, 1992) shaped how survivors evaluated their worthiness of care, credibility, and compassion. Women who perceived themselves as having transgressed ideals of respectability appeared particularly vulnerable to shame and self-blame, reinforcing silence and inhibiting disclosure. Importantly, these dynamics were not only externally imposed but frequently internalised and reproduced interpersonally, particularly through other women. Gender policing, often framed as protection or pragmatism, appeared to function as a mechanism through which patriarchal

norms were sustained while responsibility for harm was displaced onto survivors.

These findings echo research on defensive attribution theory (Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983) which suggests that blaming survivors offers a false sense of safety by denying shared vulnerability. Within this framework, conformity to patriarchal norms is positioned as protection, while deviation is framed as risk. When abuse occurs despite conformity, survivors are left to reconcile harm with deeply ingrained beliefs that “good” women are safe. This dissonance frequently intensified shame and self-surveillance, reinforcing the belief that suffering resulted from personal failure rather than systemic violence.

The therapeutic relationship itself emerged as a key site where toxic femininity was both reproduced and disrupted. Gendered transference shaped how survivors related to therapists, particularly female practitioners, with fears of judgement, maternal criticism, or moral evaluation often projected into the therapeutic space. Therapists described the emotional labour required to navigate these dynamics, particularly in the absence of explicit frameworks for naming gendered conditioning. Without such language, practitioners risked colluding with self-blame by validating endurance, prioritising emotional regulation over expression, or avoiding confrontation in the name of neutrality.

Crucially, participants described moments where explicitly naming these dynamics created shifts in clients’ self-understanding. When shame and silence were reframed as socially conditioned responses rather than individual deficits, survivors appeared more able to externalise responsibility and experiment with assertiveness, anger, and boundary-setting. This supports feminist arguments that healing requires not only emotional containment but the disruption of power relations that position women’s distress as personal weakness rather than political harm.

The findings raise important implications for trauma-informed practice. While trauma-informed frameworks emphasise safety, regulation, and empowerment, they do not consistently engage with the gendered socialisation that shapes women’s self-perception and coping strategies. Without explicit attention to toxic femininity, trauma-informed approaches risk individualising distress and reproducing the very norms that contribute to silence and self-blame. This study suggests that therapy must move beyond neutrality to adopt a reflexive, feminist-informed stance that actively interrogates how gendered conditioning operates within therapeutic encounters.

Training and supervision emerged as critical gaps. Participants described navigating these dynamics intuitively rather than through formal guidance, highlighting the absence of structured training on internalised misogyny, gendered transference, and intra-gender policing. Given the prevalence of these patterns in work with women survivors of abuse, their omission from counselling curricula represents a significant ethical concern. Therapy cannot remain politically neutral in the face of culturally sanctioned self-denial; to do so risks reinforcing harm under the

guise of professionalism.

Taken together, the findings position toxic femininity as a clinically relevant and under-theorised construct within counselling and psychotherapy. By naming how gendered norms shape shame, silence, and therapeutic engagement, this study contributes to a growing body of feminist-informed research calling for therapy to be understood not only as a site of healing, but as a potential site of resistance. Addressing toxic femininity within therapeutic practice is therefore not simply an enhancement to trauma work, but a necessary step toward ethical, liberatory care for women survivors of abuse.

Implications for Therapeutic Practice

The findings of this study highlight the need for counselling and psychotherapy to engage more explicitly with gendered socialisation and internalised misogyny within trauma work. Internalised shame, self-blame, and silence were shown to shape not only survivors' experiences of abuse, but also how they engage in therapy. Without explicit attention to these dynamics, therapeutic practice risks reinforcing compliance, emotional suppression, and self-surveillance under the guise of neutrality or emotional regulation.

Therapists must therefore be supported to recognise toxic femininity as a socially conditioned survival strategy rather than an individual deficit. This includes developing confidence in naming gendered scripts within the therapeutic relationship, challenging moral self-critique, and affirming anger, assertiveness, and boundary-setting as legitimate responses to harm. Training and supervision that explicitly address gendered transference, intra-gender policing, and internalised blame are essential to prevent the inadvertent reproduction of harmful norms within therapy. Positioning therapy as both a relational and political space may enhance ethical, trauma-responsive care for women survivors of abuse.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study was based on a small qualitative sample of four therapists, which limits the generalisability of the findings. While the depth of participants' reflections provided rich insight into therapeutic encounters, the perspectives captured reflect a specific professional and cultural context. Future research could extend this work by including a larger and more diverse sample of practitioners, as well as exploring how toxic femininity operates across different therapeutic modalities and cultural settings.

Further research is also needed to centre survivors' voices directly, examining how women themselves understand and experience toxic femininity within therapy. Longitudinal studies exploring how explicitly naming and addressing these dynamics impacts therapeutic outcomes would offer valuable insight. Additionally, future work could investigate how training interventions focused on gendered socialisation influence therapists' confidence, reflexivity, and clinical practice.

Conclusion

This study explored how toxic femininity manifests within therapeutic work with women survivors of abuse, highlighting its role in sustaining shame, silence, and self-blame both prior to and within therapy. The findings demonstrate that toxic femininity operates not only as a cultural phenomenon, but as a clinically relevant dynamic that shapes therapeutic engagement and recovery. Without naming these dynamics, therapy risks reproducing the very conditions it seeks to heal – offering adaptation to harm rather than transformation.

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The impact of stigma from professionals towards autistic parents - By Karen Blinco BSc (Hons) Health & Social Care

P= autistic parents E= interaction with health services O= challenges, experience and impact

This topic was chosen due to lived experience as a late-diagnosed autistic parent. When seeking support from professionals, there was no provision specifically aimed at autistic parents within the local area. Wider reading identified a clear gap in autism-informed support for parents, alongside evidence that autistic parents may be treated differently due to alternative parenting styles and coping strategies. Key issues identified within the literature include growing recognition of autistic adults becoming parents, Services mainly designed around neurotypical parenting norms, Evidence of stigma, misinterpretation, and heightened safeguarding anxiety towards autistic parents. The literature search was conducted using University of Lancashire library databases, Boolean search techniques, Key search terms such as autism, autistic adults, stigma and professionals, CASP appraisal tools to assess quality and filter out irrelevant studies. Research question findings, Stigma and professional judgement, misinterpretation of autistic traits, heightened safeguarding anxiety, Lack of autism-informed practice, Impact on engagement and wellbeing, Importance of change: Practice improvement, Policy and professional training, Autism informed services, and safeguarding

Background:

- Improving services for autistic parents within health and social care settings to ensure equality and safeguarding
- There are approximately 700,000-1 million autistic people in the UK, with around 700,000 adults potentially undiagnosed, highlighting the scale of unmet needs
- Autism has a strong genetic component, with heritability estimates of 80-90%. Approximately 1 in 100 people are autistic, meaning a significant proportion are parents or will become parents
- The experience and support needs of autistic parents remain under-researched
- Safeguarding supports strength-based practice; however, research suggests that parents may experience scrutiny due to misinterpretation of autistic traits rather than evidence of risk

Aims

1. To examine literature exploring autistic parents lived experiences of professional stigma and judgement when seeking support
2. To identify key barriers created by professional attitudes and service structures that affect autistic parents' access to health, education, and social care services
3. To consider how correct professional practice, training, and support systems could be improved to better meet the needs of autistic parents

Methodology:

- The University of Lancashire Library Database was used to find literature
- Boolean search strategies were applied using key terms
- Advanced filters were used to ensure papers were up to date, relevant and peer-reviewed
- Compared qualitative to quantitative research
- Used PEO to choose a question
- CASP appraisal tool
- Identified key themes by using a thematic approach
- Ethics were considered

Policy and Government Acts:

- Equality Act 2010
- Care Act 2014
- Autism Act 2009
- National Autism Strategy for England
- NICE – Autism in Adults (CG142)
- Frameworks supporting findings
- The Double Empathy Problem
- Social Model of Disability
- Strength-based theory
- Ecological system theory

Key themes/findings:

- Autistic parents experience high levels of stress and exhaustion often failed to perceive overload, proactive functioning demands and managing parenting responsibilities
- Barriers due to lack of autism informed practice and limited understanding of autistic adults as parent
- Stigma and judgement from professionals and wider society
- Communication challenges
- Despite negative, strong emotional bonds, rigid routine and deep empathy (limitation) solely focuses on mothers not fathers and non binary



Recommendations:

- Mandatory training for HCP
- Consistently implementing reasonable adjustments and reviewing regularly
- Develop specialist support pathways specifically for autistic parents
- Strength-based and person-centred approaches
- Inclusion of autistic parents in service design and policy development
- Further research into autistic goals
- Increased peer-led community-based support

Conclusion

- professional stigma towards autistic parents remains a significant barrier within health and social care services
- stigma is often linked to lack of autism informed, communication differences, and deficit-based assumptions
- barriers contribute to increased stress and reduced access to support
- strengths shown strong bonds and empathy
- bridging gap between lived experience and policy intention

700,000 people in the UK have autism



QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH VS. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH VS. MIXED METHODS RESEARCH

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH	QUALITATIVE RESEARCH	MIXED METHODS RESEARCH
1. Aims to quantify data and generalize findings from a sample to a population 2. Uses statistical analysis to understand patterns and relationships 3. Often involves large sample sizes 4. Focuses on objective, measurable data 5. Results are often presented in numerical form	1. Aims to understand the meaning and experiences of individuals 2. Uses open-ended questions and interviews to gather data 3. Focuses on subjective, non-numerical data 4. Often involves smaller sample sizes 5. Results are often presented in narrative form	1. Combines both quantitative and qualitative methods 2. Allows for both statistical analysis and exploration of meaning 3. Can provide a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon 4. Often involves a sequential or concurrent approach 5. Results are often presented in a combination of numerical and narrative form

Research papers:

- Here list the 5 paper you have used for your findings:
- Study 1 – A Qualitative Exploration into the Sensory Experiences of Autistic Mothers (Talbot, et al., 2023)
 - Study 2 - Autistic Parents' Personal Experiences of Parenting and Support: Messages from an Online Focus Group (Hwang & Heslop, 2023)
 - Study 3 – A comparative study of autistic and non-autistic women's experience of motherhood (Poni et al., 2020)
 - Study 4 – Autism Diagnosis in the United Kingdom: Perspectives of Autistic Adults, Parents and Professionals (2018)
 - Study 5 - 'I'm not just being difficult...' - I'm finding it difficult: A qualitative approach to understanding experiences of autistic parents when interacting with statutory services regarding their autistic child (Radev et al., 2023)

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Findings

- **Theme 1: Structural and funding-related barriers to inclusion**
 - Limited resources and staffing
 - Impacted on availability of teaching assistants and specialist support
- **Theme 2: Challenges in accessing and implementing EHCPs**
 - Delays and emotional burden for families
 - Difficulties implementing EHCPs in practice
- **Theme 3: Psychological and emotional impact of structural barriers**
 - Emotional distress and reduced sense of belonging in children
 - Carer/teacher exclusion and advocacy fatigue

- stress and emotional overload among education professionals
- Theme 4: Need for training and professional preparedness in inclusive practice
- Lack of training limits inclusive practice
- Staff report low confidence and preparedness

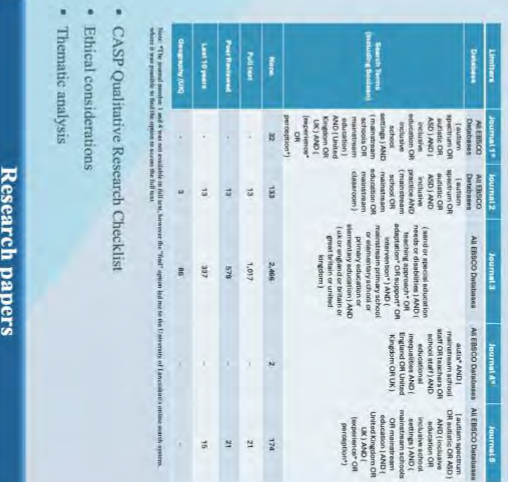
Recommendations

- Investment in autism-specific training for education professionals
- Prioritise autism-specific and ongoing staff training
- Strengthen educators' confidence, empathy and inclusive practice

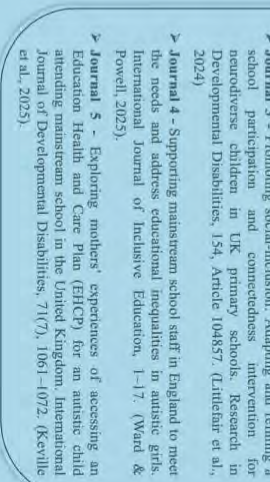
- Further research into funding allocation and EHCP processes
 - Conduct primary research into SEN funding allocation
 - Examine local authority EHCP processes to improve efficiency

Conclusion

Despite the existence of a strong legislative framework that promotes inclusion, such as the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice, there are still significant difficulties in the effective



- The studies analysed also demonstrate that the impacts of these limitations go beyond organizational aspects, directly affecting the psychological well-being of children and their sense of belonging to the school community (Littler et al., 2024), the emotional exhaustion of caregivers (Keville et al., 2024) and the feeling of overload and lack of preparation of education professionals (El-Salahi et al., 2025).



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An Introduction to the Issues Faced by Children and Young People who are Affected by Parental imprisonment

By Ben Raikes

The author qualified as a Social Worker in 1992, initially working as a Probation Officer in Greater Manchester. After a move to work as a Court Welfare Officer for a few years he worked for the NCH Action for Children Family Mediation and Support Service in Manchester, where he set up and managed a parenting project for mothers at HMP Styal. In 2007 he began his academic career at the University of Huddersfield where he worked as a Senior Lecturer in Social Work and a researcher. From 2010 – 2013 he was a researcher on the pan-European Children of Prisoners Interventions and Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health (COPING) project. Over the last 15 years his research has included two evaluations of the Acorn House overnight stay facility for children to stay with their mothers at HMP Askham Grange and international comparisons of the lived experience of grandparents who care for children while their parents are in prison. He was part of the Welsh Government funded Actioning a Schools and Prisons Independent Research Evaluation (ASPIRE) team in 2024 which explored pan-Wales models of support for children with imprisoned parents. He is a founder and board member of The International Coalition for Children with Incarcerated Parents (INCCIP) which champions the rights of children with parents in prison worldwide. He was awarded his PhD focussed on this subject in 2022.

Abstract

It is essential to understand the situation faced by children and young people who are affected by parental imprisonment to provide them with the best possible support. My intention is for this paper to provide an introduction to the issues which I hope will be informative for professionals who are likely to encounter young people in this position, especially teachers and those in the field of health and social care. I will start by providing some reflections on undertaking research with people in prison and their families and the associated ethical issues. Background information will be set out to provide context. The importance of recognising the unique situation of each child and young person affected will be highlighted. Recent innovative practice will also be explored.

Ethical Issues

I would like to pay tribute to all the young people and their families who have courageously shared how having a parent in prison has affected them with myself and many other researchers. Without them being prepared to share their lived experience we would not have the insight and knowledge that exists today.

Clearly research with children and families affected by imprisonment is a very sensitive subject with many ethical issues. I was aware of the vulnerability of imprisoned people to feel coerced into consenting to research (Edens et al., 2011), for example due to the imagined consequences of not participating on their chance of being granted parole. I'll always remember briefing a group of about ten mothers who I had been informed had agreed to participate in the evaluation of the overnight stay facility for mothers and their children at HMP Askham Grange open prison (Raikes & Lockwood, 2011). I was very pleased we had so many participants. However, I knew it was important to stress again the voluntary nature of the research, and that there were definitely no consequences for withdrawing their participation. Given that there appeared to be a very positive relationship between staff and the women serving sentences, I did not expect my offer for anyone who was not sure about participating to leave to result in anyone dropping out. However, I was wrong as three mothers at that point decided to leave. I was sad to lose some participants but very pleased that they had felt empowered to make a decision not to participate.

However, this should not put researchers off conducting research with imprisoned people. It is essential that they have the chance to have their voice heard provided all the associated ethical issues are carefully considered, including providing emotional support.

Regarding the involvement of children in research there are those who are against it due to their lack of maturity (Devries, 2015). There are also those who consider hearing directly from children and young people is essential to ensure their experiences are incorporated into policy and the design of services (Balen et al., 2006). My alignment is with the latter group, again subject to rigorous attention to ethics.

During the COPING Project I interviewed a young man where the power dynamics between adult researchers and young people were highlighted in sharp relief. The thirteen-year-old participant had been put forward for the research by the charity that was supporting him. He had the experience of having a close relationship with his father who had received a long prison sentence for a very stigmatised offence against a non-family member. The young man confirmed his consent at the start of our interview. However, early on during our interview, although he was trying to put a brave face on it, he was clearly becoming increasingly uncomfortable. As soon as this was apparent, I checked in again about whether he was still happy to consent. When I offered him the chance to withdraw he nodded enthusiastically and left to be back with his mother. I knew that I could have prolonged the interview in the interest of recording his valuable experience. However, that would have been entirely unethical and would have been an abuse of my position of power as a researcher. It emphasised the importance of 'dynamic consent'. Dynamic consent regards obtaining consent as not being a one-off event, but rather offering participants the chance to change their choices about consent over the course of their participation (Mascalzoni et al., 2022). This young man was supported by a local charity dedicated to supporting young people in his position, and I was able to report back to them the outcome of the interview so they could provide ongoing support. For the COPING project the research was conducted in close collaboration with the charity Partners of Prisoners Support

Service (POPS) which is based in north Manchester. This collaboration meant that workers from POPS, who knew the families well, could quickly pick up on any concerns relating to child or adult participants.

Importance of language

From the outset it is important to recognise the impact that language can have on how we perceive families who are affected by imprisonment. The terms we use have the power to either humanise those in prison or to 'other' them and play into negative stereotypes (Fredriksson, 2019). The word 'inmate' is very stigmatising whereas using the words 'parent in prison' foregrounds the parent identity rather than the fact they are in prison. Likewise, children in this situation have requested a move away from the previously used term 'children of prisoners', preferring to be referred to as 'children with imprisoned parents' (CIP). Their reasoning is that the former suggests that this is their primary identity which will determine their future, whereas the latter conveys that having a parent in prison is just one of their many attributes. (Weidberg, 2017).

Difference between Criminal and Family Justice systems

The contrasting way in which the removal of a parent from a child is dealt with in the Family and Criminal Justice systems is striking. In the Family Justice System there are lengthy enquiries into what is in the best interests of affected children, with the appointment of a Social Worker to ensure the welfare of children is paramount. By contrast people are regularly sent to prison in the Criminal Justice system with no enquiries being made regarding whether they are a primary carer for children and what impact their absence might have upon children. It is not uncommon for children to be left stranded at school after the parent, who would normally pick them up, has been given a prison sentence (Minson, 2020).

No official recording system

As there is currently no system in place to record the exact number of children with a parent in prison the figures are based on estimates. Most recent estimates suggest that there are approximately 160,000 children in this situation in the U.K, which equates to around 7% school age children (Prison Reform Trust, 2026). In recent times England and Wales have consistently imprisoned the most people in Western Europe. Therefore, the impact of imprisonment on children is most widespread in England and Wales compared to other Western European countries. In January 2024 the prison population in England and Wales stood at over 88,000, its highest ever number (Jones & Lally, 2024).

The Labour Party made a commitment to identify the number of children affected by parental imprisonment in their 2024 Manifesto (The Labour Party, 2024). This commitment has been followed through with ongoing collaboration between the Ministry of Justice and The Department for Education. There is recognition that this needs to be handled with great

sensitivity, in terms of respecting families' right to privacy, and being matched with meaningful support. (England and Wales Parliament, 2025).

Challenges faced

Children with a parent in prison in England and Wales are 25% more likely to suffer mental health problems than their peers who do not have that challenge (Jones et al., 2013). They are also likely to feel the loss of their parent acutely and to be vulnerable to a decline in their school performance (Murray et al., 2012). In addition to this they can face bullying (Saunders, 2018) and social isolation (Weidberg, 2018). In a recent study 71% of respondents disclosed that they had lost friendships as a result of the stigma associated with having a family member in prison (PACT, 2023). It is also important to recognise that for some families the imprisonment of a parent can lead to a sense of relief if their offending has directly impacted on their family, for example in relation to domestic abuse (SCCRJ, 2019).

Over the last two decades a statistic that 65% of boys with a parent in prison will go on to offend themselves has been widely used, for example in the 2017 Farmer Review (Farmer, 2017). However, recently the validity of this figure has been questioned since it is based on a small number of boys in a longitudinal study that began several decades ago (Bald, 2024). The statistic has been used as leverage for funding on the basis that providing support for children with a parent in prison will reduce inter-generational offending. While this can be appealing to funders this narrative is very offensive to children in this situation as it makes negative assumptions about their future prospects. It is important that support is provided to these children and young people as a commitment to their right to have the best childhood possible in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989), rather than it being solely driven by a desire to reduce reoffending as a benefit to society as a whole. Support focussed on reducing reoffending promotes a deficit model. Whereas a children's rights-based model of support is a strengths-based approach that is focussed on the potential of each child and young person (Loucks et al., 2026) and recognises that many thrive and are resilient despite the challenges they face (Brookes, 2014).

Maternal imprisonment

Although children with a parent in prison share some characteristics their circumstances are determined by their individual situations. One of the pioneers of research in this field observed research has 'tended to mask significant heterogeneity in children's experiences ... this is not one monolithic group' (Adalist-Estrin, 2018, p.102). Children with a mother in prison generally face far more disruption than children who have a father in prison. This is because 90% of children with a father in prison stay in their home with their mother during their father's prison sentence, providing some stability and continuity. However, only 5% of children affected by maternal imprisonment remain in the same home they lived in before their mother was imprisoned (Caddle and Crisp, 1997). This means they are often moved away from their family, school and friendship support networks at the time when they need them the most.

Only 9% of children with mothers in prison are cared for by their fathers (HM Government, 2007). They are most commonly cared for by grandparents (Raikes, 2016), with other care arrangements including extended family, friends and being taken into state care. If they are cared for by friends or extended family they can feel like they are imposing upon them (Raikes et al., 2019) adding to their stress. With women only making up around 5% of the prison population, in a system primarily designed for men, children with mothers in prison represent a marginalised group within an already marginalised group. Therefore, children and young people affected by maternal imprisonment can experience extra shame and stigma (Beresford, 2018).

Sentence length and offence type

Other significant factors for children with a parent in prison include the length of the prison sentence their parent is serving and whether it is a determinate or indeterminate sentence. An indeterminate sentence, such as a Life sentence or the now abolished sentence of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP), as its name suggests, has no definite end date. Parents serving these sentences cannot be released until they have satisfied the Parole Board that they are safe to be released. This can involve undertaking courses but often the parent in prison is not moved to the prison where the course is conducted. In these circumstances affected children and families can give up hope of the parent ever being released with the associated toll on their wellbeing and mental health (McConnell & Raikes, 2019).

The type of offence the parent has been convicted of is very significant with sexual offences typically being the most stigmatised (Evans et al., 2021). Families of people in prison can suffer 'secondary victimisation', in some cases due to the way they are treated by professionals, and this is especially true of families where a parent has committed a sexual offence (Loureiro, 2016).

Ethnicity

The ethnicity of an imprisoned parent and their family can have a significant impact. Families from ethnic minority communities can face an extra layer of worry in relation to whether their imprisoned parent is safe and also whether their cultural needs are being met. The report into the tragic death of Zahid Mubarek (Keith, 2006), twenty-six years ago, concluded that 'institutional racism' was the context for the brutal murder of Zahid, a first time offender, by his racist cellmate. The significance of this was brought home to me when I did a lecture on this subject several years ago when one of my students approached me to say they had personal experience of having their father in prison. I was shocked when they went on to tell me their father had been murdered by another prisoner in what was accepted to be a racist attack. At the time when we spoke the trauma of the murder was being rekindled by the fact that the person who committed the murder was applying for parole. I also recall interviewing a British Pakistani young person for the COPING project whose father was in prison. He told me how he felt reassured at the visitors centre at the first prison his father was held at as halal food was on sale. However, when his father was moved to another prison he was worried when halal food was not

an option at the prison visits centre. This caused him to worry that his father's Muslim culture would not be respected during his sentence.

Grief and loss

Children with a parent in prison can experience the loss of their parent as a bereavement. However, it is a bereavement that they are unlikely to share with their friends due to the shame and stigma attached to it, and if they do share it they are unlikely to receive much sympathy for it. One young woman, who I interviewed for the first evaluation of the overnight stay facility at HMP Askham Grange (Raikes & Lockwood, 2011), told me she found it easier to pretend to her friends that she did not have a mother. Young people in this situation can be regarded as experiencing 'disenfranchised grief' which refers to grief that is stigmatised and not openly recognised (Worden, 2018). For some children their situation is compounded by not receiving a truthful explanation for the reason why their parent is absent (Lockwood & Raikes, 2018). Parents and carers often consider it is kindest not to tell children that their parent is in prison, telling them, for example, they are 'working away'. However, this can lead to feelings of confusion and anxiety manifesting as 'ambiguous loss'. In this situation children's lack of clarity about where their parent is can lead to other aspects of their world feeling uncertain and insecure. (Bocknek et al., 2009). Charities assisting families affected by imprisonment recommend that children should be given a truthful age-appropriate explanation of their parent being in prison, with more details being shared as a child gets older (Families Outside, 2012). This is especially important given there is a high chance that people beyond the family will hear about a parent being sent to prison via social media.

Impact of different stages of the Criminal Justice process

Children and young people can be adversely affected when their parent is at each stage of the criminal justice process (COPE on line). As mentioned earlier, before their parent is arrested, they can suffer directly as a result of their offending or due to the ripple effect of it, for example as a result of incidents occurring at their house. If their parent is arrested at their house it can feel like their home has been broken into, especially if the police force entry. They may have their belongings in their bedroom turned upside down by the police which feels like a huge invasion of privacy. The trauma of police raids can live on for a very long time for children, especially if they have any special needs. If the parent is on bail then children can witness the deterioration of their parent's mental health as the court date draws nearer. This can manifest in the parent misusing drugs or alcohol to cope, and even being driven to attempt suicide. The uncertainty faced can be increased if the parent's case is frequently adjourned. If the parent is remanded in custody then their children and family face a sudden separation with no opportunity to say a proper goodbye to each other. Parents who have experienced imprisonment report having a feeling of relief once they have been sentenced since only then do they know what sentence they are dealing with, compared to the uncertainty in the lead up to the sentence (Jones et. Al, 2013).

The experience for family members keeping in touch with a loved one in prison will be determined by the security level of the prison they are sent to. Also, the distance of the institution from their family will have a large impact on the regularity of visits. This is especially so for children with mothers in prison as the fact that there are fewer female prisons means they are likely to be held further away. The average travelling distance to visit mothers in prison is sixty miles with fifteen per cent of mothers detained over 100 miles from their home (Prison Reform Trust, 2025). Families anticipate release as a positive time and with great hope. However, release is often a difficult time of adjustment, for example for children who have lived with their grandmother during their mother's sentence (Raikes & Lockwood, 2019) or for a parent who has been in prison a long time when much has changed whilst they have been away.

The importance of school support

Young people have expressed their views about what they want and do not want in terms of how schools deal with the issue of their parent's imprisonment (Jones et al, 2013). They want one trusted teacher to know about their situation, and for that teacher to be able to support them during challenging times. They do not want all the teachers knowing as they fear they will be gossiped about. They want empathy about their situation from a teacher who understands what they are going through. For example, if their parent moves prison, they will be distracted until they know their parent is as settled as they can be in their new setting. This might mean that young person has to miss school to visit the parent during the week, and they will need the trusted teacher who knows about their situation to authorise their absence. Also, if the young person is quiet on a Monday after visiting their parent at the weekend, they need to be able to take time out from lessons without having to explain themselves. Teachers also need to be mindful of activities focussed around Mother's or Father's day, as they can also be triggering for a young person with an absent parent in prison. Young people also want teachers to understand the issues they face through training, preferably as part of the training qualification taken by teachers. They also would like the issue of parental imprisonment to be discussed in general terms, in a way that does not identify anyone's personal situation, as part of the programme of awareness on a variety of subjects that schools run. Their hope is that this would help to normalise imprisonment and therefore reduce stigma. (Raikes, 2013).

Unfortunately, in the course of my research, I have heard from young people about poor practice by teachers. One young man told me that whilst he was sitting an exam a well-meaning but ill-informed teacher took the opportunity to ask him quietly how his father in prison was while walking round invigilating an exam. The young man told me that this caused him to lose concentration as it brought to the fore his worries about his father. Another young man told me that when he was acting up in his class one day the exasperated teacher shouted at him 'you'll end up just like your father'. This immediately drew unwanted attention to his father's situation, adding to his feelings of stigma and vulnerability as he thought it would cause more of his fellow pupils to know about his father's imprisonment (Raikes, 2013).

There are very positive examples of schools supporting children with parents in prison as discussed below e.g. Invisible Walls School Zone (Invisible Walls, online). As well as facilitating teachers to come into the prison for a parent's evening type event, Invisible Walls asks schools within a specified radius of the prisons they work in to designate a teacher to champion the rights of pupils with parent in prison, in effect to be the trusted teacher as requested by young people. Many schools have agreed to sign up. There is now much more awareness of the crucial role schools can play and publications to educate school staff have been produced which include resources to raise awareness about the subject. (PACT, online) and a model template school policy on the issue that schools can adopt (CHAS, on line).

Good Practice

Over recent years there have been some notable examples of good practice that have improved the situation for children with parents in prison. Since around 2010 HMP Askham Grange, an open women's prison near York, has operated Acorn House. Acorn House is an overnight stay facility that allows children to stay overnight with their mothers in a house within the prison grounds for one or two nights. Partners and other family members are excluded which means children receive the undivided attention of their mothers which is priceless in terms of bonding. Mothers and their children can engage in simple activities, such as baking, doing homework, or plaiting each other's hair, unsupervised by prison staff. I have evaluated the facility twice in 2010 and 2018 and it was so moving to hear the accounts of the mothers who regained their confidence to be mothers and their children who valued their time with their mothers so highly. The overnight stay facility allows a quality of contact that is not possible on ordinary visits where children under 18 always have to be accompanied by an adult. Also, on ordinary visits there is not the time to process complex emotions as nobody wants to risk ending the precious allocated two hours of visit time in a state of distress. However, the overnight stays can allow time for the emotional impact of imprisonment to be discussed prior to a mother's release, which can in turn make her return home less emotionally fraught. (Raikes & Lockwood, 2011, Raikes & Lockwood, 2019).

There are a growing number of charities that have pioneered innovative family work within both men's and women's prisons such as The Prison Advice and Care Service (PACT), Barnardo's, and Invisible Walls to name a few. The latter has worked with the private prison provider G4S to develop wings within prisons dedicated to housing men who are serious about being better fathers. All fathers entering these wings must undertake an emotionally painful and demanding course where they look critically at why they have come to prison, and the impact it has had on their families and children. In return they receive a better standard of cell accommodation and enhanced opportunities to engage with their children on visits and other joint activities, including prison-based Scouts and School Zone.

Schools Zone is a parents evening that is run within the prison visits hall or virtually over video link. Teachers meet with the father in prison, their children, and the person who cares for the children. I have witnessed these events, interviewed the participants and seen the benefits of

them first hand. The children involved are so excited to have the normally separated parts of their world brought together, and to show their father their school work. The fathers in prison, who often themselves have had a poor experience of school, are apprehensive before meeting teachers, fearing they will be judged. They are then hugely relieved when teachers treat them with respect, which is a very tangible way in which stigma is challenged and reduced. The event can engage the fathers in involvement with their children's progress at school in a way that they had not been before they came to prison. I have done focus groups with fathers who have been involved and they have been inspired to start attending parents' evenings when they are released, For those whose education was patchy they can be motivated to take education classes so they can keep up with their children's progress.

The teachers involved are often nervous as it is their first time in a prison. They experience the stress of being searched as they go into the prison, and also how intimidating the environment is with clanking doors and high walls topped with razor wire. This makes them much more empathetic towards children who might come to school subdued after a prison visit the day before. However, teachers leave with a totally changed perception of fathers in prison and they often encourage their colleagues to be involved in School Zone on their return to their schools. The engagement can also be a bonding joint experience that they have had with the child involved, which they can refer back to at times when they need to support the child through hard times. (Invisible Walls, on line).

Another important innovation has been the development of a Child Impact Assessment Framework in 2022 (Prison Reform Trust, on line). This is a tool that can be used by any professionals who are supporting children and young people with a parent in prison. The emphasis is on the feelings of the affected child about how they are affected and also what support they require. It is an approach focussed on the UNCRC right for children's views to be heard

Conclusion

Over the last two decades there have been significant advances in our understanding of the lived experience of children and young people affected by parental imprisonment, driven by increasing levels of research. Face to face and virtual support groups have been very successfully developed by charities such as Time-Matters UK (<https://www.timemattersuk.com>) (who pioneered them), Children Heard and Seen (<https://childrenheardandseen.co.uk>) and other agencies focussed on providing support. However further funding is needed to ensure all children and young people who want support can access it, rather than it being the current postcode lottery.

The fundamental issue that needs to be addressed is the ever-increasing numbers of people who are being imprisoned in England and Wales. The more people who are imprisoned, a high proportion of whom are parents, the more children and young people are impacted. Clearly some offences are so serious that only an immediate custodial sentence is appropriate. However, as a result of recommendations by the Council of Europe in 2018 and the Joint Parliamentary Commission on Human Rights in 2019, the judiciary now have considerable discretion that allows them to avoid sending parents who are primary carers to prison in borderline cases. They can achieve this by imposing a community penalty or by suspending imprisonment. However, for the most part, judges choose not to use that discretion. Until that changes the corrosive impact of parental imprisonment on large numbers of children will continue.

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Finance and Therapy: The connection between money, financial difficulty and mental health and wellbeing

By Rachel Hanson Level 5 FdSc Counselling and Psychotherapeutic Skills

1. Introduction

The Money and Mental Health Policy Institute (Murray & Bond, 2023) reported that over 1.5 million people in England experience problems with both their mental health and debt. A link exists between a client's concerns about money and mental health, with one impacting on the ability to manage the other, creating a vicious circle of anxiety, guilt, shame and sleep problems (Mind, 2022; Holkar & Mackenzie, 2016; Mental Health and Money Advice, 2024). The Office for National Statistics (2023) found that 49% of British adults with energy debt also had high levels of anxiety and lower levels of wellbeing. Adults are more than twice as likely to have very poor mental health and to be behind with their household bills (Money Advice Trust, 2025). This link led to Mind (2022) developing 'Money and Me', a guided support programme but it does not provide therapy for clients experiencing mental health problems or financial anxiety.

This literature review examines two major themes within the context of financial anxiety and the role of therapy 1. the impact of mental health conditions, specifically gambling addiction and 2. socio-economic factors, focusing on low-income households. Given the pace of change and impact of the financial environment from factors such as Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, it focuses on literature written over the past ten years.

2. Finance and Therapy

Financial anxiety covers many concerns including "*financial stress, financial distress, financial worries, economic insecurity, financial concern, financial challenges and financial strain*" (Ahamed & Limbu, 2024, p.1676-1677). The Money and Pensions Service (2022) reported that 57% of people with a recent mental health issue felt anxious thinking about their financial situation. Darcy (2022), who sees a missed opportunity within UK mental health services to explore the link between finances and mental health, reported that worrying about finances led to 54% of UK adults feeling anxious, depressed, filled with dread or unable to cope, where falling behind with bills was more likely amongst those with recent mental health issues than those without a mental health problem.

2.1. Mental Health Conditions

Having a mental health condition can impact a client's ability to deal with money. The Financial Conduct Authority (2025a;2025b) report at least 9 million of all UK adults have a mental health condition or illness. Of those with poor mental health, difficulties interacting with financial providers or dealing with their finances were seen including 2 million adults struggling to cope with managing money, 2 million adults putting off dealing with financial matters e.g. ignoring or not opening correspondence and 1.5 million adults falling into debt and unable to deal with difficult financial situations. In addition, 22% of all adults felt overwhelmed and stressed when dealing with financial matters and 40% of those with credit or loans said they suffered anxiety or stress due to debts. A link to financial capability was seen for certain mental health conditions, as defined in DSM-V (2013), including gambling addiction which is examined further to give context to the connection between mental health and financial problems.

2.1.1. Addictive Disorders – Gambling

The link between gambling and depression is well researched and understood to have a negative emotional and mental health impact requiring support from mental health services (Churchill & Farrell, 2018). Gambling is also a way of exhibiting control that can lead to cognitive distortions including seeing gambling as financially profitable, that the desire to win money drives financial losses from the illusion of control that cognitive distortions give in providing coping mechanisms (Mathieu et al., 2017; David et al., 2026, Marchica et al., 2020) leading to anxiety and depression amongst problem gamblers (Barrault et al., 2017). Non-monetary emotional factors including escapism and excitement to increase the feeling of wellbeing, rather than the ability to win and the incentive to have more money, are seen as central to the motivation for gambling (Flack & Morris, 2015; Vaughan & Flack, 2022). Bilevicius et al. (2018) identified the connection between shame and depression with feelings of embarrassment and worthlessness, leading to addictive behaviour, including gambling, to self-medicate to cope with painful feelings suggesting therapy as a clinical intervention to help to reduce shame. Self-compassion techniques including mindfulness-based interventions were effective in dealing with the escapism and avoidance behaviours of gambling, providing coping strategies, through awareness of behaviours and relaxation techniques, facilitating a different response to the urge to gamble and deal with underlying feelings of anxiety (Maynard et al., 2018). These techniques are seen as effective alongside the use of more traditional therapeutic models for dealing with addiction like cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) (McIntosh et al., 2016).

Addiction studies see high attrition in participants leading to missing data and honesty about the extent of their addiction that could impact on these results, however these studies are consistent in their findings on the role and impact of gambling and mental health. The impact of gambling appears consistent across the UK, Europe and the US, regardless of gambling method, however these studies predominantly focus on the behaviour of males, with female behaviour needing further study to see whether motivating factors differ. Whilst the need for emotional regulation

for psychological distress and gambling issues are the same, different gender-specific interventions may be needed (Artemi et al., 2025).

2.2. Socio-economic factors including debt and low-income households

The 11th Financial Fairness Tracker Survey (Evans et al., 2025) showed that certain populations within the UK continue to be more likely to be struggling or experiencing serious financial difficulty, including those out of work due to ill health, social renters, the unemployed, those in the lowest income bracket and those on means-tested benefits. 88% of those in serious financial difficulties said thinking about their financial situation made them feel anxious and 81% said their financial situation was making their mental health worse. This is supported by Gunasinghe et al. (2018) who found that common mental health disorders were greater in the UK for people who were in debt and in the socioeconomic disadvantaged groups of low-income households, on benefits and the unemployed, especially amongst ethnic minorities and single households. However, they identified it was not typical for those in debt to access mental health related services or talking therapies and furthermore, for those with an existing mental health condition who had used mental health services including talking therapies previously, prior to any debt or increase in debt, did not seek further help when their situation changed. Mental health or money problems may not be revealed by UK residents until they are experiencing serious issues, with barriers being a lack of awareness of the support available, stigma and problems being able to access support due to the issues they are experiencing (Lally, 2024).

Significant financial problems and mental pressures are similar in the US being higher amongst the unemployed, lower-income households, renters, and those living on their own, being more vulnerable to stress and less able to cope psychologically, who Ryu and Fan (2023) state would benefit from an integrated approach to managing financial worries and mental stress with collaboration between financial and mental health professionals to understand and improve clients mental wellbeing. Harper et al. (2024) found that low-income households who were trapped in a cycle of debt, compounded by neo-liberalist political economic drivers and deregulation (Sweet, 2018) that made it easier to borrow more at higher rates, impacted physical and mental wellbeing leading to feelings of shame, guilt, overwhelm, stress and anxiety. The impact was compounded by difficult decisions to prioritise spending to survive, however, they argue that not all respondents felt that debt had a negative impact on their mental health e.g. mortgage loans against the value of property that typically increased in value. This highlights the importance of understanding motivating factors and driving factors behind the client's circumstances so that therapy can get underneath what is going on for the client to cause the feelings of stress and anxiety where the consequences of financial debt impacts relationships, the ability to work and physical wellbeing as well as psychologically.

The reporting of household debt relies on self-reported assessment of debt and an ability to make payments (Francis-Devine, 2025). Different definitions of financial wellbeing and hardship are used in studies, which is often subjectively measured by respondents e.g. difficulty paying bills, inability to afford food or the inclusion of certain debt e.g. credit cards, or even a lack of

debt. However, the consensus of the studies used here is that however financial hardship is determined, the connection between the poor state of one's finances, debt and the impact on mental health, and vice versa, is clear. It can be supported by financial counselling alongside psychological counselling to help deal with the shame, stigma and impulse control but having a common mental health disorder does not always result in financial problems (Ten Have et al., 2021). There are multiple socio-economic groups; whilst this literature review highlights the impact of debt specifically in low-income households, it is noted there are a number of other groups e.g. students, where the reasons for debt and motivations may differ and whilst the need for therapeutic support is evident, the nature and way this support is delivered may differ providing an area of potential further investigation.

2.3. Accessing counselling for financial and psychological therapy

Counselling, including person-centred exploration of self-esteem, values and locus of evaluation (Mayer et al., 2019; Proeve et al., 2019), CBT and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (Goffnett et al., 2020; Ghasemi et al., 2019), helps clients to develop coping strategies to deal with feelings of anxiety, guilt and shame linked to financial anxiety, debt and changes to spending habits (Sweet, 2021). Financial therapy helps clients to understand their attitudes and relationship with money (Sidhu, 2023) and whilst growing as a therapeutic approach within the UK, is more readily available in the USA, as a specialised certified therapy. It brings together financial and therapeutic boundaries helping clients to think, feel and behave differently towards money to improve wellbeing (Kagan, 2023) and is defined by the US Financial Therapy Association (2025) as *"a process ... that helps people think, feel, communicate, and behave differently with money to improve overall well-being through evidence-based practices and interventions"*. It helps clients to overcome issues e.g. financial anxiety, negative beliefs and self-concepts regarding money, relationship issues connected to money setting goals without giving financial advice (Summers & Gutierrez, 2018). It integrates the cognitive, emotional, behavioural, relational, and financial aspects of wellbeing, where Swift et al. (2025) report that financial wellbeing and health outcomes improve through financial counselling, reducing the negative impact that debt can have to mental health. However, they acknowledge a current lack of access through social and financial exclusion and also that a lack of debt does not mean financial wellbeing or conversely that debt is an indicator of financial hardship.

Whilst the connection between mental health and money is strongly evidenced in this review, including those managing a mental health condition and those in lower socio-economic groups, there is an argument that addressing financial hardship and better financial education is also needed to help support people in these groups, whilst combining interventions that support mental and financial health (Dote Pardo & Parra-Domínguez, 2025; Tibbetts et al., 2025; Grable et al., 2020). The integration of NHS talking therapies and debt advice has been proposed and it is thought that giving money advice whilst receiving therapy could increase the recovery of those struggling with depression and debt from 24% to 51% and those with anxiety and debt from 41% to 53%, helping over 27,000 people experiencing depression and anxiety (Bond, 2023). This is

supported by further research by Belcher et al. (2025) who saw a benefit to providing money advice sessions alongside psychological therapy pointing out that the earlier provision of money advice could lead to better outcomes for clients in improving anxiety and depression. Neither study reports on the benefit of different types of therapeutic approaches, with NHS Talking Therapies on which both studies were based, being primarily CBT based, where further research could be undertaken on the benefits that other approaches could deliver.

2.4. Limitations to the research

Much of the financial research relies on a subjective assessment by the participants to determine financial hardship, debt and payment problems and the extent it impacts on their mental health (Marshall et al., 2020; Dackenhag et al., 2019; Mahendru et al., 2022) and problem debt definitions may be different across studies. Client behaviour and the impact of socio-economic factors may differ between the UK and US, including the welfare state and benefit provision, that may impact the extent that financial issues are experienced. Furthermore, there is limited literature available on the impact of financial therapy within the UK, as the role of financial counselling is not recognised within the UK unlike the US. An opportunity exists for research to explore the impact that certified financial therapy could have within the UK.

2.5. Additional Considerations

Whilst conducting this literature review, consideration with regards to ethical research and data protection has been considered in the context of counselling and psychotherapy.

2.5.1. Concepts of ethics of counselling in research

The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Ethical Framework (2018) requires quality and integrity within the research process and findings. Research should be for the benefit of clients and developing counselling professional knowledge and practice and the rights of participants independently considered and reviewed in advance of being undertaken. The BACP (2019) ethical research guidelines state that researchers have the same responsibilities to participants as they would their clients but awareness of the differences for sharing data where confidentiality as a counsellor and publishing data as a researcher needs to be understood. Participants need to give explicit informed consent and the research should not lead to adverse effects causing mistrust or harm to clients (West, 2002; Bond, 2004a). Researchers need to be aware that the relationship can create a power imbalance together with any potential impact to the respondent of the possible identification of their data and in particular where areas of vulnerability and social diversity are being considered, as reviewed here including mental health, financial circumstances and social difference (Bond, 2004b).

Peer reviewed journal articles across a mixture of empirical studies including systematic reviews, literature reviews and theory articles (Sansom, 2019; Grant & Booth, 2009) were used within this literature review and checked to ensure that no conflicts of interest were reported by the authors to minimise bias and maintain the integrity of the research (Ancker & Flanagan, 2007; Annane et al., 2019). Reputable financial industry, mental health organisations and government publications were used to provide statistics against which the information from the selected peer-reviewed journal articles could be compared (Mitchels & Bond, 2021).

2.5.2. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection

GDPR and Data Protection is important as counsellors contract with their clients to ensure data is stored in accordance with GDPR (2018) and UK Data Protection (2018) regulation; that accurate records are kept and stored securely and client confidentiality is maintained. It is also a requirement under the BACP (2018) Ethical Framework and BACP Ethical Guidelines for Research in the Counselling Professions (2019) that client data is protected from unauthorised disclosure with client consent to use personal data. GDPR covers participants consenting to research data being used only for the intended purposes but does not apply to anonymised data. The Information Commissioner's Office (n.d.) identifies two key data protection principles, where appropriate safeguards must be in place to protect research data: 1. personal data can be kept indefinitely if used for research purposes but must be deleted when no longer needed and 2. existing personal data can be reused, including special category data, for research purposes provided there is legitimate/public interest.

When conducting research, personally identifiable information must be anonymised to avoid the risk of harm to participants of being identified if personal data is made public that can be traced to them given the sensitive topics that counselling and psychotherapy covers. Winship et al. (2024) note a variety of approaches to ethical guidelines are taken by different psychotherapy journals in publishing research and argue that an ethical standard is required to ensure that informed consent and withdrawal of consent, confidentiality and data anonymisation is achieved consistently in counselling research. The passing of sensitive information is also protected under data protection legislation for clients that are in vulnerable groups and have protected characteristics to avoid discrimination where mental health and financial information is important to discussing issues. Data protection is essential for referral information to securely pass between financial professionals or therapists when working together to provide joined up psychological and financial support.

Conclusion

The link between money and mental health is established through research and the impact of struggling to manage either has consequences for a client's wellbeing and ability to deal with feelings of anxiety, guilt and shame, that can lead to financial anxiety. Providing therapeutic support to help clients to identify the reasons for their mental health issues, including gambling addiction, and financial issues, including socio-economic factors like low-income and debt is important. Whilst the dedicated role of a financial therapist, as seen in the US, provides specific benefits to clients to help them deal with both financial and mental health impacts, the reasons for the mental health concerns, like gambling addiction, may be wider than just the impact of the state of a client's finances. Therapists can support clients to deal with the effects of stress and better manage their mental health and understand the drivers of financial pressures and vulnerabilities that clients may be experiencing in their lives. There is a role to be played by all those involved in helping clients manage their finances (Ryu & Fan, 2023), in understanding the impact on a client's mental health and their ability to deal with money. Therefore, a holistic approach across financial and mental health providers is suggested from this review alongside educating those that are struggling to manage their money, like the 'Money and Me' programme being offered by Mind (2022).

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"Transformational leadership [TL] approach in primary education and its impact on children's emotional well-being" by Renata Sikora BSc (Hons) Health & Social Care

P-children in primary education
E-transformational leadership approach
O-children's emotional well-being

Introduction:

- Growing recognition of children's mental health and well-being in education (Allard et al., 2025)
- TL as identified as a promising approach
- Post-pandemic shift for compassionate leadership (Wood, 2022)
- Personal and professional interest
- Gap: Limited research connecting TL with children's emotional well-being

Key themes/ findings:

1. TL as a foundation for emotional well-being
2. TL improves school culture and teacher motivation and commitment
3. Teacher well-being as an indirect pathway through which leadership affects children
4. Tension between academic performance and well-being priorities
5. Well-being leadership must be whole-school, relational and embedded in everyday practice

Policy/ theory

- Department for Education (DfE)
- Ofsted Education Inspection Framework
- Teacher Standards
- Children and Families Act 2014

Background:

- Current trends and challenges in primary education (Swain, 2025)
- Why leadership matters in school culture (See et al., 2024)
- TL as a motivational and collaborative model (Wilson Heenan et al., 2023)
- Need for leadership that balance academic and emotional needs

Papers

Wood, P. (2022). The post-pandemic shift in educational leadership: A call for compassionate leadership. <i>Journal of Educational Leadership</i> , 24(1), 1-10.	Swain, R. (2025). The challenges of primary school leadership in the current climate. <i>Primary School Leadership</i> , 15(2), 1-5.	See, S. H. (2024). The role of leadership in school improvement. <i>Journal of Educational Leadership</i> , 26(1), 1-10.	Wilson Heenan, S. A. (2023). Transformational leadership in primary schools: A review of the literature. <i>Journal of Educational Leadership</i> , 25(1), 1-10.	Allison, L. (2024). The impact of leadership on school culture. <i>Journal of Educational Leadership</i> , 26(1), 1-10.	St James, C. (2024). The impact of leadership on school culture. <i>Journal of Educational Leadership</i> , 26(1), 1-10.
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Aims:

1. Examine how TL is practiced in primary education settings.
2. Explore relationship between TL and the emotional well-being of children in primary schools.
3. Identify the ways in which TL can create positive and supportive school environment that promotes children's emotional well-being

Methodology:

- PEO for forming the question (Hosseini et al., 2024)
- Mixed method approach
- Boolean operators
- Databases (EBSCO, CINAHL, PubMed)
- Sampling/ participants (teachers and headteachers)
- Data collection methods
- Data analysis (thematic analysis)
- Ethical considerations and limitations

Recommendations:

- Adopt targeted TL training for primary school leaders
- Implement a whole-school approach to emotional well-being
- Embed staff wellbeing as a leadership priority
- Address the struggle between academic demands and well-being
- Strengthen collaborative decision-making and emotionally informed teaching
- Enable time for wellbeing-focused communication

Conclusion:

- TL has indirect impact on children's well-being (See et al., 2024; Oturk et al., 2024)
- Leaders must prioritise trust, collaboration, and shared values
- Teacher well-being emerged as a important bridge to children's well-being
- TL in align with current UK education policy is suitable framework for bringing these policies in everyday school life

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Evaluating the Effects of Lifestyle and Psychological Interventions on Obesity in Adults

By Tony Nonso Ezeifedikwa BSc (Hons) Health & Social Care

P = adults with obesity in the UK

I = lifestyle and psychological interventions

C = control groups with no interventions

O = weight loss and BMI

Introduction/Background

- Obesity is abnormal accumulation of fat in the body (WHO, 2024). Adults with BMI of 30 and above have obesity with BMI 25 and above is overweight (Purnell, 2023).
- 16% of worlds adult population (890 million people) had obesity in 2022 (WHO, 2025). In UK about 1 in every 4 adults has obesity (NHS, 2023) and 36% of adults aged 55-74 were living with obesity in the year 2022 (NHS Digital, 2024).
- Obesity and related illnesses cost the UK healthcare services about £6.5 billion yearly (UK Government DOH, 2022).
- It is caused by multiple factors like poor dietary behaviours, low physical activity, poor sleep, stress, alcohol use, genetics, depression, and certain medications (Ahmed & Mohammed, 2025). Socioeconomic factors like income, access to healthy food and opportunities for exercise can also raise obesity risk. (Lee et al. 2019).
- In older adults, muscle loss, slower metabolism and menopausal changes due to age can increase obesity risk (Batis & Villareal, 2018).
- Obesity increases the risks of many chronic diseases and conditions and reduces overall quality of life (WHO, 2025).
- Obesity is managed through lifestyle and behavioural intervention, which are often more accessible and affordable (Wadden et al., 2020), and through the use of medications like semaglutide and surgical intervention (Reid & Korne, 2022).

Aims & Objectives

Aim: To assess the effects of different lifestyle and psychological interventions on weight loss and general wellbeing in adults with obesity.

Objectives: 1) To assess the effects of diet and dietary behaviours on weight loss in adults with obesity in UK.

2) To evaluate the effects of exercise or physical activity interventions on weight loss in adults with obesity in UK; and

3) To examine the impacts of psychological interventions like motivational interviewing on weight loss and general wellbeing in adults with obesity.

PICO Research Question: How effective are lifestyle and psychological interventions for obesity in adults in UK?

P (population) = adults with obesity in the UK ; I (intervention) = lifestyle and psychological interventions; C (comparison) = control groups with no interventions; O (outcome) = weight loss and BMI

Research Justification: Obesity is a global public health concern with many associated health risks and there are very few literature reviews on multiple obesity interventions in the UK from the last 10 years.

Methodology

The research methodology is systematic review because 5 existing high-quality studies on obesity interventions for UK adults were critically examined and compared in a structured and objective manner. This strengthened the conclusions and reduced personal bias (Martinez et al., 2025). The UCLan online library database was searched for articles on physical activity, dietary and psychological interventions as single or combined obesity intervention.

The database was searched using keywords like obesity, physical activity, diet, BMI, psychological interventions, motivational interviewing, weight loss, and UK, to increase the chances of finding only articles relevant to the topic as recommended by Aveyard (2023). Boolean operators including AND, OR, and NOT were used to combine keywords, which helped narrow the search by including all specified keywords (AND) or by including similar keywords (OR) as recommended by Bramer et al. (2018).

Filters were applied to ensure that only freely available, peer-reviewed and UK research published within the last 10 years were selected. Primary studies were excluded and quantitative/mixed research methods were selected because the measured outcome (weight/BMI) is numerical. The CASP tool was used to assess the quality of the 5 selected studies by appraising the aim, research method, sampling procedure, research ethics, findings and conclusion of each, while also evaluating credibility and reliability. Key findings and themes across all studies were recorded. This study followed research ethics for a secondary research, including providing citations, following a rigorous and systematic selection process and avoiding personal bias (Tripathy, 2013).

Research Papers

Study 1: Time-restricted eating as a weight loss intervention in adults with obesity (Przuj et al., 2021).

Study 2: A free-living, walking-based, exercise programme, with exercise timed relative to breakfast, to improve metabolic health in people living with overweight and obesity: A feasibility study (Barrett et al., 2024).

Study 3: A Remotely Delivered Weight Management Service to Support Existing Obesity Services in the UK National Health Service: Preliminary Findings From an Early-Stage Service Evaluation (Spaltro et al., 2025).

Study 4: An evaluation of a multi-component adult weight management on referral intervention in a community setting (Birnie et al., 2016).

Study 5: A feasibility randomised controlled trial of a motivational interviewing-based intervention for weight loss maintenance in adults (Simpson et al., 2015).

Key Themes/Findings

- Lifestyle and psychological interventions led to clinically significant weight loss and improvements in multiple health markers.
- The combination of multiple interventions resulted in the best weight loss outcome (Birnie et al., 2016).
- Psychological wellbeing are important for long-term obesity weight management (Simpson et al., 2025; Birnie et al., 2016).
- The use of technology like mobile apps and remote monitoring is important for modern weight management because it makes it easier to receive support without clinic visit and to track and adhere to interventions (Spaltro et al., 2025; Barrett et al., 2025).
- People are more likely to follow simple obesity interventions like walking and TRE, not complex ones (Przuj et al., 2021; Barrett et al., 2024).
- This research has major strength because it provides a broad and balanced view of adult obesity interventions through a systematic review, using tools like PICO and CASP to ensure reliability. However, it is limited by small sample sizes and short research periods for some of the reviewed studies. This means findings may not be generalised and long-term effectiveness of interventions cannot be confirmed.

Relevant Policies/Legislation

- The UK policy paper titled *Tackling Obesity: Empowering Adults and Children to live healthier lives* was published in 2020 (DOH 2020).
- The Calorie Counting Regulations 2021.
- The Care Act 2014 and the NHS-Long-Term Plan 2019

Recommendations

- Health care providers & practitioners must prioritise multi-component adult obesity interventions because they are more effectiveness.
- Focusing on simple weight loss interventions to ensure adherence and adopting modern technology to help with intervention delivery.
- Providing intensive psychological support in long-term interventions.
- Future obesity intervention studies should prioritise larger sample sizes and longer duration of research to fill research gaps.

Conclusion

Obesity is still prevalent in the UK and around the world with negative impacts on health outcomes, quality of life, and healthcare costs. This study has shown that lifestyle and psychological interventions can be effective for managing adult obesity by carrying out a systematic review of 5 relevant studies. Nevertheless, healthcare providers and practitioners should follow this study's recommendations to maximise effectiveness of interventions.

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“Holy Mountains” and the Politics of Genocide Denial: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Armenian Collective Memory

By Joshua Bellot, BSc, GMBPsS

This article examines how System of a Down’s “Holy Mountains” (2005) functions as a counter-discursive response to Armenian Genocide denial. Drawing on critical discourse analysis, cultural trauma theory, and scholarship on memory and popular music, the article argues that the song does not merely represent historical suffering but offers a discursive resource for collective remembrance, moral judgement, and ethical claim-making. Close analysis of the lyrics identifies three interrelated formations: haunting trauma, moral condemnation, and justice through symbolic homeland. These are realised through triadic labelling, metaphor, repetition, and geographic imagery that construct victims as enduring witnesses and perpetrators as morally condemned agents of violence and denial. The analysis is limited to lyrics rather than musical form, and its claims are therefore restricted to the discursive construction of memory and resistance within the text itself. The article contributes to discourse studies, genocide studies, and social psychology by showing how a popular song can articulate bottom-up resistance to hegemonic denial narratives.

Keywords: *critical discourse analysis, genocide denial, cultural trauma, collective memory, popular music, Armenian Genocide*

Introduction

Genocide denial is not simply disagreement over the past. It is a discursive practice through which power shapes legitimacy, regulates memory, and sustains moral and political asymmetry. In the Armenian case, denial has remained central to struggles over how the 1915 genocide is publicly named and remembered. Scholarship on denial shows that it often works through minimisation, deflection, euphemism, and the displacement of responsibility, all of which help preserve collective innocence and obstruct recognition (Smith et al., 1995; van Dijk, 2006). From a psychological perspective, denial also intersects with cognitive dissonance, moral disengagement, and identity protection, suggesting that historical non-recognition is inseparable from the management of collective self-concept and moral unease (Festinger, 1957; Kelman & Hamilton, 1989).

This article analyses “Holy Mountains,” a song by System of a Down released in 2005, as a cultural text that resists Armenian Genocide denial and articulates justice claims through language. The song is significant because it combines explicit moral condemnation with

references to Armenian sacred geography and collective loss. Rather than treating the song simply as protest music, this study asks how it works discursively to produce a politics of memory. The central research question is: how does “Holy Mountains” use linguistic strategies to resist genocide denial and demand recognition?

The article brings together critical discourse analysis, cultural trauma theory, and scholarship on music as social action. Fairclough’s model helps explain how language constructs meaning, enacts power, and links to wider social practice (Fairclough, 1995, 2003). Cultural trauma theory clarifies how collective suffering becomes publicly meaningful when narrated as a shared moral wound requiring acknowledgment (Alexander et al., 2004). Work on memory and music further suggests that songs can act as mnemonic resources, preserving affective and political forms of remembrance that exceed formal institutions (DeNora, 2000; Eyerman, 2001; Frith, 1996). On this view, “Holy Mountains” is not only an artistic response to atrocity; it is a discursive intervention into the struggle over how atrocity is named, remembered, and judged.

Theoretical framework

The analysis is guided by three connected bodies of theory: critical discourse analysis, cultural trauma and memory, and music as social practice.

First, critical discourse analysis conceives language as a site where ideology is both reproduced and contested. Fairclough (1995, 2003) argues that discourse should be understood at three levels: text, discursive practice, and social practice. At the textual level, one examines lexical choice, metaphor, grammar, and rhetoric. At the level of discursive practice, one considers the production, circulation, and consumption of texts in specific contexts. At the level of social practice, one situates discourse within broader structures of power and ideology. This framework is well suited to genocide denial because denial operates through language: it reshapes responsibility, reorders moral categories, and attempts to control the boundaries of legitimate memory (van Dijk, 2006).

Second, cultural trauma theory explains why the song’s language matters socially. Alexander et al. (2004) argue that trauma becomes cultural when groups construct narratives that identify a harmed collectivity, assign responsibility, and claim moral significance. Trauma is therefore not simply an individual reaction to violence but a process of meaning-making through which groups narrate shared suffering. This is especially relevant in contexts where official recognition is absent or contested, because cultural texts may carry the burden of memorialisation that institutions refuse to assume. Assmann’s work on cultural memory and Halbwachs’ account of collective memory reinforce this point: remembrance is never merely stored; it is socially organised, rhetorically framed, and politically contested (Assmann, 2011; Halbwachs, 1992).

Third, the article treats music as a form of social action rather than a neutral aesthetic object. DeNora (2000) shows that music helps organise feeling, identity, and everyday practice, while Frith (1996) argues that popular music is a site where social meanings are performed rather than merely represented. Eyerman (2001) similarly demonstrates that music can mediate cultural

trauma by providing an expressive form through which collective suffering is narrated and preserved. These accounts help explain why a song like “Holy Mountains” can function as more than commentary: it becomes a vehicle for memory, solidarity, and moral address.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that genocide denial is not only a historical problem but also a discursive and mnemonic one. The central analytical task is therefore to show how “Holy Mountains” resists denial by constructing a counter-memory through language.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative critical discourse analytic approach because the research question concerns how language constructs memory, identity, and moral judgement in a culturally contested text. CDA is particularly appropriate for examining genocide denial because denial is not only an empirical claim about the past but also a discursive practice that organises responsibility, legitimacy, and symbolic power. A qualitative design is therefore necessary to capture the interpretive and context-dependent features of the lyrics that would not be visible in a purely quantitative analysis.

This study uses qualitative critical discourse analysis of the lyrics to “Holy Mountains” by System of a Down (2005). The song was selected because it explicitly references Armenian memory and contains dense patterns of moral condemnation, symbolic geography, and collective address. The analysis focuses on lyrics only. This is a deliberate scope decision: the research question concerns linguistic strategies of denial resistance, and the aim is to examine how meaning is produced in the verbal text itself. A multimodal analysis of melody, rhythm, instrumentation, and vocal delivery would be valuable, but it lies outside the present study’s scope.

The analytic procedure involved close reading and interpretive coding of the lyric text. The lyrics were first read line by line, with repeated lexical items, evaluative language, pronoun shifts, and references to place marked as preliminary observations. These were then grouped into broader interpretive categories and refined into three higher-order discursive formations: haunting trauma, moral condemnation, and justice through symbolic homeland. These three formations were selected because they represented the most analytically salient and recurrent patterns across the lyric text. Other possible groupings were considered during coding, including broader thematic categories such as memory, violence, and identity, but these proved less useful because they either overlapped too heavily or described content without explaining discursive function. By contrast, haunting trauma, moral condemnation, and justice through symbolic homeland captured distinct rhetorical logics that could be traced consistently across multiple passages and that together explained how the song constructs counter-memory. The coding process was inductive but theory-guided: initial observations about repetition, labelling, and place-based imagery were refined through engagement with Fairclough’s CDA, Reisigl and Wodak’s work on discriminatory rhetoric, and cultural trauma scholarship (Fairclough, 1995, 2003; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Alexander et al., 2004).

To improve transparency, the analysis moved iteratively between the lyric text and the emerging categories. Initial labels were retained only when they could be linked consistently to a clear textual pattern and a relevant theoretical construct. For example, where several lines referred to the dead, these were first marked as memorial imagery, but were later recoded as haunting trauma once it became clear that the lyrics were not simply remembering loss; they were presenting the dead as an unresolved social presence that continues to demand recognition. Similarly, repeated place references were recoded from descriptive geography to symbolic homeland once they were read as part of a broader claim about belonging, return, and justice.

The three final categories were stabilised through repeated rereading and comparison across the full lyric text. Early codes were not treated as fixed labels; instead, they were tested against later passages to check whether they captured recurring patterns rather than isolated lines. Categories were retained only when they remained coherent across multiple lyric segments and when they could be linked to the same broader interpretive logic. This process reduced the risk of over-fragmenting the text and helped ensure that the final groupings reflected sustained discursive patterns rather than one-off rhetorical effects.

Codebook

Code	Definition	Example textual features
Haunting trauma	Language that frames the dead or the past as present, unresolved, or socially persistent	"haunting presence," repeated invocation of victims
Moral condemnation	Language that assigns direct moral blame to perpetrators or deniers	"liar, killer, demon"; "honor, murderer, sodomizer"
Symbolic homeland	References to place, land, or return that carry memory and identity claims	"river Aras," "holy mountains," "mountainside"
Collective agency	Pronouns and phrases that construct a shared "we" or reclaimed voice	"we're free," repeated collective address
Denial resistance	Language that refuses ambiguity, euphemism, or minimisation	direct accusation, moral polarisation, refusal of neutrality

A clear example is the line "Can you feel their haunting presence?" This was initially marked as a general memorial reference because it explicitly invokes the dead. However, in the next stage of analysis it was recoded as haunting trauma for two reasons. First, the phrase "haunting presence" suggests that the victims are not merely remembered but remain symbolically active

in the present. Second, the rhetorical question addresses the listener directly, turning remembrance into an ethical demand rather than a passive recollection. Read through cultural trauma theory, the line therefore does more than describe loss; it frames unresolved suffering as a continuing moral claim on the present.

This analysis was not designed as an inter-coder reliability study; instead, it follows an interpretive qualitative approach in which analytic rigour comes from transparency, theoretical grounding, and systematic rereading. The study is interpretive rather than exhaustive. It does not claim to infer authorial intention with certainty, nor does it generalise to all Armenian cultural production. Instead, it offers a theoretically informed reading of one song as an example of how popular music can intervene in contested memory politics. Because the article is concerned with discourse as social practice, the lyrics are treated as a situated cultural text rather than as isolated poetic expression.

Reflexivity

This analysis is shaped by my background in psychology and my interest in social justice, which likely heightens sensitivity to power, trauma, and historical denial. That positioning supports the ethical importance of the topic, but it may also orient the reading toward victim-centred and accountability-focused interpretations. To reduce the risk of over-reading, I kept the analysis close to the textual evidence, used established theoretical categories to guide interpretation, and framed broader claims cautiously. The aim was not to speak for survivors or claim a definitive reading, but to show how the lyrics construct a particular moral and mnemonic frame.

Interpretive decisions were checked through repeated return to the lyric text and comparison with the theoretical literature. Codes were only retained when they were supported by more than one textual cue and when the interpretation remained consistent with the wider argument of the song. Where a line could plausibly support more than one reading, the analysis favoured the interpretation most strongly grounded in the surrounding wording and the song's repeated patterns. This was important because the study is qualitative and interpretive, so the aim was not to eliminate subjectivity entirely but to make interpretive choices as visible and defensible as possible.

Results

The analysis identifies three interrelated discursive formations: haunting trauma, moral condemnation, and justice through symbolic homeland. These are outlined in Table 1 and then discussed below.

Table 1. Core discursive formations in “Holy Mountains”

Discursive formation	Key lyric features	Discursive function
Haunting trauma	“haunting presence,” repeated invocation of the dead	Constructs genocide as unresolved, ongoing, and morally present
Moral condemnation	“liar, killer, demon”; “honor, murderer, sodomizer”	Produces unambiguous blame and refuses moral ambiguity
Justice and homeland	“back to the river Aras,” “holy mountains,” “we’re free”	Reclaims symbolic geography and frames recognition as ethical necessity

Haunting trauma

The song’s recurring reference to “haunting presence” frames the dead not as absent but as symbolically active. This is more than metaphorical flourish. Within cultural trauma theory, trauma persists when a group cannot fully integrate the event into public memory because acknowledgement remains blocked or contested (Alexander et al., 2004). The lyric therefore works against temporal closure. Instead of presenting genocide as a completed episode, it configures it as an unresolved condition that continues to shape identity and moral relation.

The repeated question, “Can you feel their haunting presence?”, also positions the listener as an addressable witness. The song does not merely describe trauma; it asks the audience to sense it. That move shifts remembrance from passive recollection to ethical encounter. In this way, the song frames memory as an obligation rather than an optional historical position. The haunting is therefore not only about the dead but about the living community’s failure, or refusal, to recognise what has been done.

Moral condemnation

The second formation is the song’s direct moral judgement of perpetrators and deniers. Terms such as “liar, killer, demon” and “honor, murderer, sodomizer” exemplify triadic labelling, a rhetorical pattern in which multiple pejorative terms are combined to intensify blame and reduce interpretive ambiguity (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). The effect is to produce a moral taxonomy in which perpetrators are not complex actors to be understood sympathetically but agents of irrevocable wrongdoing.

This matters because denial often works through a different strategy: it dilutes responsibility, disperses blame, and introduces interpretive uncertainty. By contrast, “Holy Mountains” refuses discursive indeterminacy. It does not seek balance or neutrality. Instead, it asserts that atrocity and denial are ethically legible and morally condemnable. The lyrics enact what van Dijk (2006) describes as counter-manipulative discourse: language that resists ideological management rather than reproducing it.

The song also collapses the distinction between act and discourse. In calling deniers “liars” alongside “killers,” it implies that denial is not simply a mistaken view but part of the violence itself. This is consistent with genocide scholarship that treats denial as a continuation of harm rather than a neutral historical disagreement (Smith et al., 1995). The lyric’s moral force depends precisely on that equivalence.

Justice and homeland

The third formation links justice to symbolic geography. References to “back to the river Aras,” “holy mountains,” and “resting on the mountainside” create a mnemonic landscape in which land, memory, and identity converge. These sites are not merely decorative references to Armenian territory. They function as symbolic anchors that reassert belonging in the face of dispossession. In this sense, the geography of the song is political: it resists the erasure of homeland by making place itself a bearer of memory.

The repeated line “we’re free” is crucial here because it shifts the song from condemnation to collective assertion. The pronoun “we” constructs a communal subject that survives violence and speaks back to it. This aligns with social identity approaches that emphasise the importance of collective self-definition under conditions of threat or devaluation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Although the song does not explicitly theorise identity, its linguistic movement from “they” to “we” performs a recovery of agency. The freedom invoked is therefore not only personal or emotional; it is also mnemonic and political.

At a broader level, this discourse of return and freedom suggests that recognition is tied to moral repair. The song implies that justice is not complete until the lost are acknowledged, the perpetrators named, and the homeland re-inscribed into memory. The result is a form of cultural remembrance that links place to ethical demand. This is consistent with memory scholarship showing that landscapes often become sites where collective claims are stabilised and transmitted (Assmann, 2011; Huyssen, 2003).

Discussion

The analysis suggests that “Holy Mountains” intervenes in the politics of Armenian Genocide denial. Its language does not merely refer to loss; it constructs memory as a moral and political

act. Several points follow from the synthesis of CDA, cultural trauma theory, and memory scholarship.

First, the song demonstrates how popular music can operate as a mnemonic resource. It does not preserve memory neutrally; rather, it organises memory through rhetorical intensification, repetition, and symbolic return. This supports Eyerman's (2001) argument that cultural forms can mediate trauma by translating suffering into shared narrative.

Second, the analysis shows that denial should be understood as a discursive strategy with psychological consequences. Denial sustains identity through disavowal, but it also creates conditions under which resistance becomes possible. The song's language counters denial by refusing ambiguity, assigning responsibility, and insisting on the moral presence of victims. In doing so, it offers a counter-memory that challenges the politics of forgetting.

Third, the paper connects memory politics to identity formation. The "we" of the song is significant because collective memory is never only about the past; it is also about who gets to speak in the present. The song's movement from accusation to collective freedom transforms mourning into agency. That transformation is central to why the song matters socially: it offers a model of remembrance that is critical, affective, and political.

These findings also contribute to genocide studies. Denial is often analysed as a state or institutional practice, but the song shows how denial can be contested from below through cultural production. Popular music, in this sense, becomes a public forum in which historical claims are re-voiced and moral categories re-established. The implication is not that the song proves large-scale social impact, but that it provides a discursive resource for counter-memory. Cultural texts may therefore be important sites where communities resist erasure and maintain continuity under conditions of contested history.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. It examines a single song, which limits transferability. It also focuses on lyrics rather than live performance, audience reception, or wider discography, any of which might reveal additional meanings. The analysis is interpretive and theoretically informed, which means it cannot claim to exhaust the text's meanings. It is also conducted from an academic position shaped by psychology and social justice concerns, which may orient interpretation toward victim-centred and accountability-focused readings by prioritising the experiences of the affected community and emphasising the moral imperative for recognition and redress within the discursive analysis.

A further limitation is linguistic. Because the analysis is based on English lyrics, some culturally specific Armenian connotations, idioms, and historical resonances may not be fully captured. This matters in a study of Armenian collective memory because translation can flatten nuance. The article is also a snapshot of the song's meaning at one historical moment. The significance of

“Holy Mountains” may have evolved since its release in 2005, and a longitudinal approach could examine how its interpretation changes across different memory climates and political contexts.

Crucially, the study can only make claims about the textual construction of discursive resistance, not about actual audience effects or measurable social impact. The analysis shows that the lyrics offer a discursive resource for remembrance and moral judgement, but it cannot establish how listeners interpret the song in practice or whether it produces broader social change. Those questions would require additional methods, such as audience interviews, fan reception analysis, or ethnographic research.

A future multimodal study would extend this analysis by examining how musical features such as melody, harmony, rhythm, dynamics, vocal delivery, and instrumentation contribute to the song’s meaning alongside the lyrics. Such an approach would allow researchers to assess whether the musical form reinforces, intensifies, or complicates the discursive patterns identified here. It would also make it possible to analyse how emotional force is distributed across verbal and sonic elements, producing a more complete account of the song’s role in memory politics.

Future research could also compare “Holy Mountains” with other songs about genocide, or investigate how Armenian diaspora audiences use music to negotiate memory and identity across media. Comparative work would help test whether the patterns identified here are specific to Armenian discourse or more general to musical responses to historical violence.

Conclusion

“Holy Mountains” demonstrates how popular music can function as a counter-discursive practice in the politics of genocide denial. Through haunting imagery, moral condemnation, and symbolic homeland, the song constructs victims as enduring witnesses and perpetrators as ethically condemned agents of violence. Its linguistic form matters because it transforms memory into public moral address. In this respect, the song is not simply about the Armenian Genocide; it participates in the ongoing struggle over whether that genocide can be named, recognised, and mourned.

The article has argued that denial is not a passive absence of truth but an active discursive process that shapes memory and identity. “Holy Mountains” resists that process by refusing euphemism, asserting collective voice, and linking remembrance to justice. The song thus shows how cultural texts can contribute to historical recognition and moral repair, while also remaining bounded by the limits of textual analysis.

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Literature Review on the Rejection of Faith and How Counselling Can Support the Search for Fulfilment

By Vikki English Level 5 FdSc Counselling and Psychotherapeutic Skills

Aristotle believed that life was about achieving Eudaimonia, denoting happiness (Ackrill, 1975). Hypatia thought life was rooted in Neoplatonism, meaning the rational pursuit of truth to elevate the soul with the divine (Majumdar, 2015). Charles Darwin, through scientific discovery, valued the participation of life through evolution (Barlow, 1958). Albert Camus posited life is absurd (Camus, 1942). Douglas Adams wrote '42' as the answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything (Adams, 1992). Richard Dawkins suggests life is not divinely ordained but self-created (Dawkins, 2024). From the earliest philosophers to recent literature, humanity has often pondered and sought the answer for leading a fulfilling life.

It is a long-standing belief in Christian theology that humans are made in the image of God (imago Dei) and are therefore superior over animals (Walker-Jones, 2017). According to the Bible; Genesis 1:27, imago Dei implies humans have free will and the moral capacity to choose (Reed, 2023). But if humans are imago Dei, there could be an argument that forcing a religious view could violate the same autonomy with which they are created. Increasingly in Western societies, either following religious trauma or deconversion, religion is more progressively being rejected. The Office for National Statistics [ONS] revealed in the 2021 England and Wales Census that "No Religion" was the second most common response to the religious identity question, which is a 25.2% increase on the 2011 Census (Roskams, 2022).

The aim of this assignment is to explore the literature around how a therapeutic relationship can ethically work to support clients who are potentially distancing themselves from religion, how the rejection of faith can occur - such as through intellectual challenge or through a gradual loss of faith, a conscious deconversion, or experience of religious trauma and how counselling aims to ethically support recovery to aid the client to live a fulfilling life.

This essay will also aim to provide guidance on how counselling practises could address the complexities around secularisation and how it could aid in the restructure of personal identities, ensuring ethical and legal frameworks are adhered to and a counsellor's personal biases are kept to a minimum. For this essay I will be using the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP] ethical framework (BACP, 2018), for ethical guidance, however there are other ethical frameworks out there which are just as robust.

The topic of Religion can be a tricky one to navigate, either due to fear of negative repercussions or not wanting to offend (Johnson & Morris, 2008). It is generally differentiated as religion relies on faith and traditions whereas science relies on facts and observations (Nieminen et al., 2020).

Religion can be tied to a person's core belief system and can determine their values & ethics, provide a structure to life and create a meaning-making framework (Krok, 2014). Also, according to research by Smith (2020) religion can be entwined to a person's familial structure, known as religious transmission, as the influence of religious ideology can be passed down from generation to generation, Dawkins (2018) however proposed it absurd to label a child with a parent's religion and believe a person must come to their own conclusion and not what is being imparted on them. According to Starnino and Sullivan (2016) the experience of religious trauma at a young age can lead to spiritual disruptions in later life. Religious trauma can be caused by fear-based controls, but not necessarily from the religion itself, but by the shame and control mechanisms that are put in place by those translating the sacred scripture (Downie, 2022).

Anderson (2023) discusses how high-control religions could cause harm and create psychological distress and guides on the use of ethical competence – such as the need for therapists to seek qualified supervisors to ensure they work ethically and utilising own therapy spaces. When working with clients who are religious or divulged that they wish to leave their religion, therapists in the UK should follow the BACP Ethical Framework and respect a client's autonomy. Religious belief is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, and therefore it expects therapists to avoid discrimination or project their personal values onto clients (GOV.UK, 2013). If therapists are practising in the Person-Centred Approach (Yao & Kabir, 2023), they ought to remain impartial, unbiased and non-judgemental to allow clients the time and space to explore any potential distress they are feeling with their religion, especially as how leaving a religion can create a loss to their core belief system as previously discussed.

In historical contexts, Charles Darwin (1809-1882) famously rejected his Christian faith over a gradual period much to the chagrin of his wife Emma (Van Wyhe & Pallen, 2012). During the voyage on the HMS Beagle (1831-1836) Darwin admitted to being orthodox about his religious beliefs. In the years following the voyage, he began to think deeply and more critically about religion. His shift in thinking strongly influenced his work and subsequent findings from his voyage led him to publish his book *On the Origin of the Species* (1859). According to the research (Ruse, 1975) Darwin's book was controversial at the time and was classed as scandalous from the Church of England, as it challenged the Christian belief of Creationism – the belief that the universe and everything we see was divinely created by God and all animals are unrelated. Darwin in his ground-breaking investigation proposed the Theory of Evolution (Darwin & Wallace, 1858) meaning each species are all interrelated and over time developed, modified and adapted to their surroundings.

The term apostate is used to describe a person who renounces faith. According to Kaegi (1965) famous apostates throughout history include Emperor Julian the Apostate (331–363), who renounced Christianity for Paganism; and research conducted by Potts (2023) specify Karl Marx (1818-1883), who was a baptised Lutheran but became a staunch atheist and critic of religion, but there is an argument to say whether Marx used atheism as a tool for his movement. In contemporary times, public figures such as the actress Leah Remini became a prominent

apostate from the modern religion of Scientology due to their apparent practises of disconnection and alleged harassment and intimidation tactics (Remini, L., & Paley, R. 2015).

Remini has stated at length how leaving Scientology affected both her spiritual and mental states. In social media posts, tv programmes and newspaper articles she speaks at length at how since leaving the religion in 2013, she has suffered from anxiety and fear, caused by alleged surveillance by Scientology operatives and her being designated a 'suppressive person' however the Church of Scientology has released statements stating this is not true (Butt, 2024). Remini has acknowledged she has sought professional mental health care and now prioritises mental wellbeing, which is in stark contrast to Scientology's opposition of psychiatric care (Kent & Manca 2012).

Research conducted by Haire (2022), shows religious exit, via apostasy or deconversion is growing and leaving a religion can cause an existential crisis. An existential crisis can be defined as the turmoil felt when questioning reality (Schnipke & MacKay, 2023). Leaving a religion and existential crises are inextricably linked due to what religion can provide to a person, such as their meaning-making framework (Park, 2005). However, once this framework is lost, a person could experience distress, anxiety, depression and have uncertainty about their life. There are a lot of therapies out there that could support a client in their journey, some of which are detailed below.

Yalom introduced *Existential Psychotherapy* (1980), and he listed death, isolation and meaninglessness as core existential concerns. Existential therapy in its approach is humanistic and classes the role of therapist and counsellor as 'fellow travellers' and in Yalom's view, classifies existential dread as a natural part of life. Existential therapy's goal is to transform any anxieties or existential dread into motivation, which in turn could help to create meaning in life. Frankl (2004) also described that people have a fundamental need for meaning and that any absence of meaning can lead to existential dread. Cooper (2003) places an emphasis on that of the therapist, in that they have an important role in supporting clients to build personal meaning. Van Deurzen (2006) ascribes existential crisis to be an inevitable part of living authentically.

While all of these provide a valuable way of framing existential dread, it can oversimplify the clients experience by believing apostasy causes distress. However, this approach doesn't take into consideration those who have left faith where the loss has been reflective because of intellectual challenge, rather than crisis driven. An existential therapist supports a client's journey to fulfilment by helping them confront any perceived absence of meaning, by encouraging personal responsibility. The therapist does this by exploring what matters most to their client. Through their journey together, fulfilment can occur not through biblical texts but by living authentically with their own developed values.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy [CBT] is a form of therapy developed by Beck (1964). The cognitive model was designed to identify core beliefs, challenge unhelpful thinking to enable a behavioural and emotional modification. This form of therapy is therapist led and could provide

useful tools and techniques for managing an existential crisis, such as through cognitive restructuring – instead of fighting a question around a fear the thought could be ‘put on trial’ and reframed – an example being the client could say to the CBT therapist “I am a sinful person because I no longer believe in God”. The goal of the CBT therapist would be to challenge the cognitive distortion, and they could do so by using a technique known as Socratic Questioning, whereby the therapist explores the evidence and weighs up for and against of the thought (Vittoria et al, 2022). Clients could find the fulfilment they are looking for by reframing their cognitions, find complementary sources of purpose and by participating in behaviour that would promote wellness. CBT can if used effectively, help clients build a new life instead of wallowing in despair. Research also indicates that existential crises can be effectively addressed within the CBT context with an added potential of integrating this with Existential Therapy (Heidenreich et al, 2021).

Person-Centred counselling, or Humanistic, is a non-directive form of therapy developed by Rogers (1951). This form of therapy places emphasis on three core conditions, these are empathy, congruence (genuine) and unconditional positive regard (accepting). The Person-Centred approach also places an emphasis on the importance of the client to self-actualise, meaning they have the power within themselves to heal, grow and find fulfilment. This form of therapy does support the client to develop self-acceptance, authenticity and trust in their own experiences and in doing so they could identify what genuinely brings them fulfilment and lead them to be independent of an external belief system; its non-directive approach could place a limit on client exploration of an existential crisis, especially as there is a lack of structure which could make it tough for a person who previously had a sense of direction with their faith.

When using any of these therapies, it is important to maintain ethical practise by creating a safe space for exploration. As per the BACPs ethical framework, having an ethical practise would involve the offer of creating a non-judgemental space where clients can openly and freely discuss their feelings to enable a safe place to explore but also one of confidentiality with informed consent. When therapists are working with clients who have prior experience of spiritual trauma, an example being in the misuse of bible verses to excuse abusive behaviours towards those in the LGBTQIA+ community, Gibbs, (2015) found that those who experienced conflict in their religious upbringing and sexual identity were at increased risk of suicidal ideation which can be attributed to internalised homophobia, it is highly likely a client will bring something deeply impactful to sessions. Prior & Petra (2019) research appears to show that mistreatment in children can result in severe psychological effects in adulthood. This research is also supported by Harvey (2022) who drew attention to how issues like fear-based teaching and power imbalances can leave a lasting psychological impact in adulthood but both concludes that more research is needed in this area.

Likewise, it is crucial for therapists to be culturally competent, self-aware and to know of their own personal biases and should work within their own competence levels as this would display to the client the therapist is trustworthy and equitable (Sue et al, 2009). This would also ensure

that the client's potential crisis of faith is handled sensitively, with respect and any cultural needs be met.

The same would also be applicable for a therapist who is religious and working with an atheist, agnostic or a client of a differing faith. It would be vital to put personal feelings aside, for example if the therapist is Catholic and if the client had divulged they had an abortion. Or if a client declares they are no contact with their mother due to an abusive childhood, but the therapist is directive by saying "she must be forgiven as she's your mother". Bishop (2018) advocates that a counsellors' religious identity and ideology when in the therapy space should be placed in the background to ensure ethical care is provided to the client. If a therapist allows their own personal values to overtake the therapeutic relationship, the collaboration with the client and more importantly the clients' autonomy would be threatened. Research by Paprocki (2014) likewise suggests a therapist who is religious and working with an atheist, agnostic or a client of a differing faith could struggle. As it would present an ethical and professional challenge for them. It also explores how in this situation a therapist could cause hurt to the client by devaluing the clients experience and should consider referring them on if they are still working together.

It is essential that therapists are aware of diversity and ought to embrace clients' differences in a positive light (Naz et al., 2019). Therapists need to view their clients' world from a place of objectivity and by not doing so would prevent therapists from entering their clients frame of reference. By utilising the BACP Ethical Framework, therapists can avoid the risk of an ethical dilemma and of possible re-traumatisation, especially when the risk could cause the client harm (Singh et al. 2024). In the space of a spiritual crisis, therapists must respect both the clients former and prospective new belief system. In not doing so, the therapist would be breaking the BACP Ethical Framework guidance by not respecting client autonomy. Legally, the therapist would be discriminatory and in breach of the Equality Act 2010, as religion is a protected characteristic, as is the right to not believe.

For therapists to work ethically, there must also be a strict adherence to the General Data Protection Act ([GDPR] gov.uk, 2018). GDPR plays a considerable role in counselling practices by strengthening client confidentiality and placing trust for the lawful processing and storage of personal data. One key attribute is that GDPR empowers clients by giving them control over their personal information, this includes the right to access any records and the right to erasure. But the clients right to erasure might be in conflict to legal obligations when it comes to maintaining records, therefore, therapists need to set client expectations to ensure legal compliance.

There is a requirement for therapists to be registered data controllers via the Information Commissioners Office [ICO]. If a therapist has a website or keeps client records, the ICO requires a privacy notice to be clearly displayed and available, defining what information will need to be collected, how it will be processed and where and how it will be stored (ICO, 2025a). This requirement can strengthen transparency and client autonomy which are essential to build trust, however it can place an administrative burden on therapists and possibly reduce time

available for clinical work. When it comes to processing personal data, religious belief falls under GDPR as “Special Category Data” (ICO, 2023). This means religious or philosophical beliefs are sensitive data and require extra protection when handling.

As the ICO requires therapists to be registered as data controllers, there is a requirement to pay a registration fee, with the amount payable being dependent on the number of therapists employed in service, but most therapists are sole traders (ICO, 2025b). While this regulatory framework supports responsibility and promotes a high standard of data protections, there is a risk of financial and administration challenges for smaller practises. Currently there are two levels of fines that the ICO can impose, both based on global turnover (total revenue of business), these are the standard tier which is 2% of global turnover or £8.7m, or the higher tier of 4% global turnover or £17.5m. While fines can act as deterrents, it does not heal the damage caused to individuals (Gregory & Bouthinon-Dumas, 2021). Overall, GDPR provides clear protections for clients which can reinforce ethical counselling practises. However, if GDPR is followed too rigidly, it runs the risk of making therapy feel more like administration as opposed to a human relationship, unless therapists apply it thoughtfully and with professional judgement.

In 2020, the clothing firm H&M was fined €35.3m by the Hamburg Data Protection Authority in Germany. H&M had unlawfully collected and stored information on employees which included religious beliefs and other personal data outside the realms of usual employment practises (Lintvedt, 2021). Even though this did not happen within the UK and was not in a therapeutic setting, it can be used as an example of bad practise when it comes to handling clients’ personal data. It is also a useful reminder that when working for an organisation there needs to be robust safeguarding in place.

In conclusion, counselling’s role in the support of fulfilment after religious deconversion is one of great importance. While existential and CBT frameworks do show a robust method for assisting a person in a spiritual crisis, there does appear to be a significant gap in research when it comes to person-centred therapy. The current research located does first and foremost concentrate on the existential approach of exploring meaning-making and finding purpose. However, there is limited research available on how the core conditions of person-centred therapy could aid or challenge a client who has left behind a belief system.

While each therapeutic approaches goes some way to separately address the emotional impact of rejecting faith, together they could cohesively provide fulfilment without faith by psychological exploration, taking personal responsibility to drive change and be accepting of reality. Ethically, it does highlight a need for therapists to adopt a more integrative approach to counselling as one size fits all does not seem fitting, as the gap in research does emphasises a need for more study opportunities on how the person-centred therapy hands off approach could support emotional processing for clients who are apostates and in existential distress as any potential client is likely to be incredibly vulnerable.

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Creative Responses to Terror

Suzanne Atkins in collaboration with Peace Collective

I graduated as a Graphic Designer and Illustrator and have continued to practice professionally as an artist and designer throughout my career in education. After being injured in a terrorist attack in 2017, I found I wasn't able to draw portraiture or observational studies; my ability to visualise and translate realistic images had been affected. It took several years and a great deal of support, therapy and practice to regain that ability and once I did, I realised the significant benefits it brought. It was this realisation that made me want to share creative practice with others. I approached the support team at the Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Foundation (now Peace Collective) with the suggestion of running art workshops. This idea developed into a collaborative project and a series of mindful drawing workshops.



Project 1: Peace Crane Project – Collaborative Installation

The Peace Crane project aimed to bring survivors together who had been affected by many different attacks in a variety of ways through a shared creative task. Inspired by the story of Sadako Sasaki, we asked people to join us in creating an installation made from 1000 peace cranes to be hung in the Peace Centre in Warrington. Each of the paper cranes included was made by or for a person affected by a terrorist attack.



Many of the cranes contained private messages, wishes and prayers, some had been decorated or illustrated, all were full of meaning and love and a combined hope for peace. Every crane was made the same way, but each held a personal significance for the person that made it. They were sent from far and wide and represent attacks that have taken place all over the world.



The process of making cranes brought people together in person and online enabling us to come together in shared experience. Others were made individually allowing for quiet thought and personal reflection. The different approaches meant we could be fully inclusive and reach individuals that could not participate in group work. We also introduced survivors to the mindful art of origami, giving them a tool that could be used as a coping mechanism in times of distress. For those that were unable to join the sessions for practical reasons, the team arranged for materials to be sent out via the post to make this project accessible for as many people as possible.



As a collaborative project the Peace Crane exhibit gave the participants a sense of solidarity and achievement while raising public awareness of the impact of trauma.



The final installation was completed and opened on 20th March 2024, to coincide with a day of reflection and celebration marking the 31st anniversary of the Warrington attack. The event was supported by the Irish Government's Department for Foreign Affairs and provided an insight into the impactful work with young people, communities and survivors. Children and young people from schools in Warrington and Liverpool attended throughout the day and through experiencing the installation and taking part in crane making sessions were able to learn about the stories behind the project.

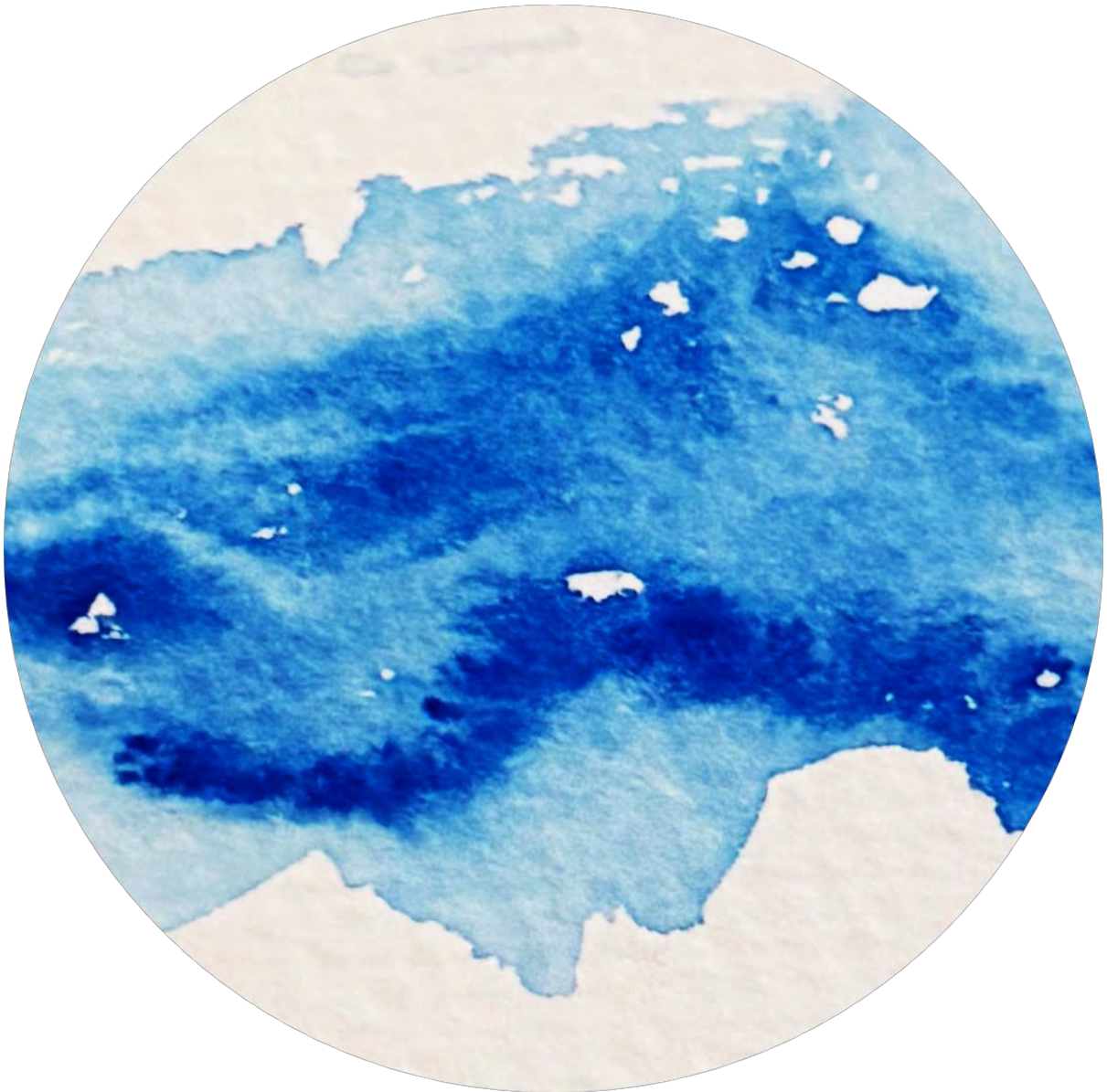
Project 2: Mindful Drawing – Guided Workshop Sessions



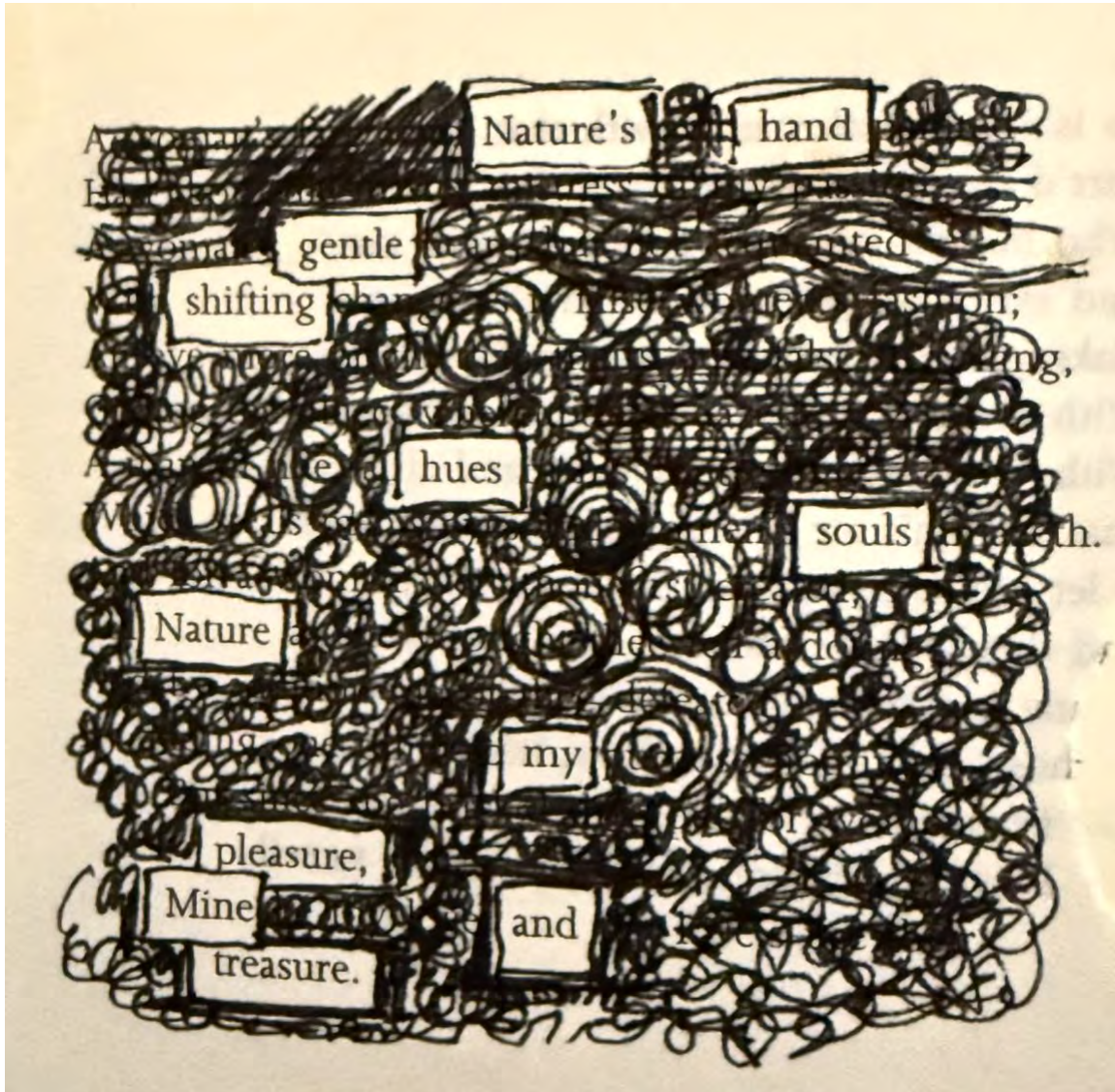
Following the success of the Peace Crane project and the positive experience of the participants, we developed a series of creative workshops exploring the process of drawing as a form of guided meditation; finding calm and mindfulness through artistic expression. Unlike some traditional image making, mindful or 'slow' drawing is all about the doing rather than the end result; tuning in to your feelings, connecting with your breath and taking notice of the marks you make, helping you to pay attention to the present moment.



The mindful drawing workshops helped to dispel the myth that art is expensive. We structured the sessions to need only basic equipment and collated materials into a kit that was sent out to participants. Each kit contained a 12cm square sketchbook, a black and a white drawing pen, a small paintbrush and a half pan of blue watercolour. We also included a few squares of black, squared, dotted and tracing paper so that participants could experiment with different surfaces. The online platform further supported the accessibility of the sessions. We encouraged a relaxed atmosphere with opportunities to ask questions or access written instructions and videos if needed. It was also important to consider any physical barriers to participation and take steps to mitigate these.



The message that no artistic experience was necessary to engage with either project was important to get across; the process is the key to this being healing creative practice. No existing skill level is needed and it isn't about the outcome. This takes the pressure off as there are no expectations as to what the participant will produce. It's something that can be done anywhere and any time, even if you only have two minutes. The way the drawing exercises are structured, you don't produce a finished outcome so you can return to it. You don't even need to have your sketchbook with you, all you need is a pen and a piece of paper.



The feedback received following both projects has been overwhelmingly positive. We have heard from participants that had previously tried yoga, meditation and other self-help methods that they had found mindful drawing particularly impactful and accessible and that they have been able to use the skills developed in times of stress and anxiety. One individual took their sketchbook to a therapy session; others said it helped them create time for themselves.

Further Collaboration

Research shows that mindful interactions with art and drawing can result in a deeper experience and a heightened sense of well-being. Right-brain stimulation helps calm the mind and body and art that engages us in a focused, creative activity, can help to quiet the mental noise that can overwhelm us. Becoming completely immersed in an activity can be calming and therapeutic and drawing in rhythmic, sometimes repetitive ways can even be a form of meditation. (Fancourt & Finn, 2019)

As both a Creative and an Educator my focus is on creativity for purpose and positive change. I believe that artists and designers can and should use their talents to make the world a better place. Creative practice can be healing; it can aid wellbeing and can support traditional modes of therapy for more successful outcomes. Through the work we have done so far, we have found that creative techniques can work in tandem with other processes such as talking therapy or EMDR. It can also provide useful tools to focus on while awaiting access to traditional therapy.

The projects have recently been featured in the outcome of an international research project led by Dr Katharina Karcher and Joanne McCuaig at the University of Birmingham. Creative Practices for Wellbeing: A Toolkit for Victims and Survivors is informed by more than five years of fieldwork and an international online survey and highlights how activities such as art, writing, gardening, music, sports, and spiritual practices can foster healing, emotional expression, and community connection. Karcher and McCuaig's research shows that most individuals discover creative practices independently, but many would value more support (with 92% expressing a desire for more guidance). Whilst developed for and with people with lived experience of terrorist violence and organizations supporting such individuals, the toolkit is also intended to be of value to victims of crime, refugees, and others seeking creative pathways to wellbeing.

References

Fancourt, D., & Finn, S. (2019). What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review. World Health Organization.

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Call for Papers

UCO Research Symposium, June 2027

The UCO Research Symposium is a day of exciting contributions from guest speakers, staff and students. The symposium is taking place in June 2027 and as in previous years, we are looking for contributions from staff and Level 6 or 7 students to share and showcase teaching, learning, research, and scholarly activity.

Your contribution could involve presenting or exploring ideas around teaching and learning, a professional activity or output, a research paper, or a teaching and research project in which you were recently involved. We are looking for: 5-minute presentations, 20-minute papers, interactive workshop or seminar session posters.

Final-year undergraduate students and postgraduate students are encouraged to present research from their dissertations or final year projects. PGCE/DE and MA students are encouraged to share their research and teaching experiences.

Participation in the symposia will enable you to share your practice and research in a supportive environment alongside invited guests. This is a great opportunity to hone your presentation skills for higher levels of study, other conferences, or in preparation for the professional arena. You will also be invited to feature your work in the next edition of Spark (UCO's research and scholarly activity journal).

Please send your proposal by 23rd April 2027 donna.sinclair@oldham.ac.uk

Spark 2027

Spark 2027 is UCO's annual research and scholarly activity journal which is available in print and online. The journal currently showcases research, scholarly activity, and the creative outputs of staff and students at UCO & OC. Contributions can include formal research papers, summaries of scholarship activities or research projects, or images of creative outputs. The maximum contribution is 4000 words or two A4 pages of images.

The deadline for submissions for Spark 2027 is 23rd April 2027. If you would like further information or would like to submit your contribution, please email donna.sinclair@oldham.ac.uk



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