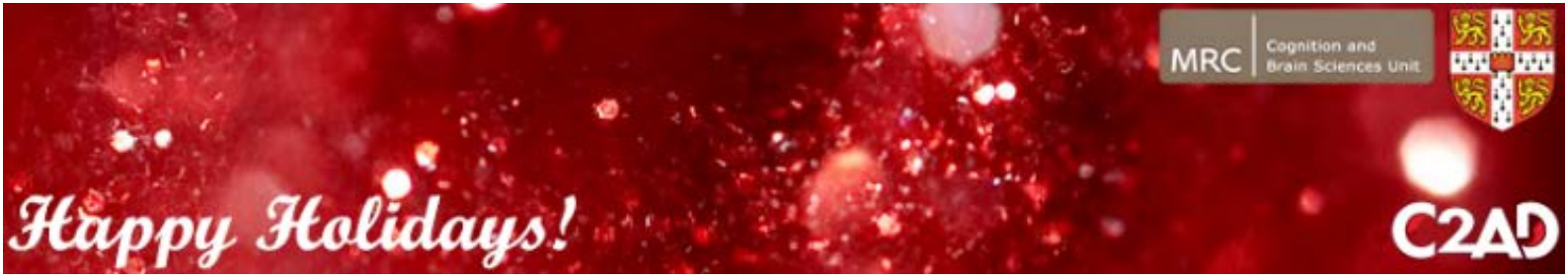

On behalf of everyone at the Cognition, Emotion, and Mental Health research group

We would like to thank you for your help and interest in our research. 2018 has been a great year of progress for us, and this would not have been possible without you.

Here is a summary of what we have been working on this year. If you would like to see the scientific papers we published with your help, check out our website www.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/our-research/dalgleish/

Projects completed in 2018

Unconscious influence of negative environments on decision- making in depression

Our decisions are heavily affected by the background environment we make them in: for example, in shopping malls, people stay longer in shops that play slow-tempo music, which increases store sales. In this paper, we showed that the influence of the background environment is different in people experiencing depression.

For background scenes that had been previously associated with losing money, people with depression were less likely to 'approach' objects in the scene that could win them money and more likely to 'withdraw' from objects that could lose them money. That is, even though the background did not affect their overall wins or losses in the environment, it had an unconscious effect on their behaviour. We think this effect may partly underpin why people with depression (when not on any medication, as in our sample) have a 'negative bias', interpreting things in the world more negatively than non-depressed people.

An Emotion and Memory Processing Intervention for PTSD with Complex features

Individuals who experience repeated interpersonal trauma exposure often experience posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with more complex features (e.g., difficulties with interpersonal relationships, feeling disconnected from the world around them, or more durable low mood).

There is currently no consensus regarding whether our usual evidence-based interventions for PTSD need to be tailored to better account for these complex features. We tested a new intervention which did more to address these complex features by using more emotion and memory focussed treatment techniques.

Results showed that the intervention not only improved PTSD, but also improved the complex features, depression symptoms, negative thoughts about oneself, and problems with regulating emotion. This suggests that it may be worthwhile to further test this intervention, as it may help to improve treatment options for individuals with a more complex experience of PTSD.

Study Updates

TAME

This year we launched a new project: A Transient Autobiographical Memory Enhancement (TAME) induction to improve everyday cognitive skills.

Low mood can make it harder to remember memories of events that have happened to us, also known as autobiographical memories. This reduces our ability to solve problems along with other daily skills, which can then keep depression going.

We've been conducting sessions during which participants with low mood are trained with a memory technique. Following this, everyone completes a task that determine how this technique affects the way remember things and solve problems. We'd like to thank all of our participants this year for volunteering their time - we hope that you found it interesting!

Recruitment for TAME is ongoing, so if you would like more information please contact caitlin.hitchcock@mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk

Depression Relapse Prevention Study

In this study, we are testing two workbooks which might help to prevent depression from returning again in the future. One workbook is on memory and how it can become stuck on the negative, and the other workbook is on all sorts of things that might make depression come back.

Lots of people have taken part already, but we are looking for more volunteers who currently have low depression symptoms. If you are currently feeling well and are interested in taking part, please contact caitlin.hitchcock@mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk

HARMONIC Trial

We know that many people with mental health problems experience more than one type of traditionally-defined 'disorder'. The HARMONIC Trial is examining the usefulness of a new intervention for common mental health problems (mood, anxiety, stressor-related and obsessive-compulsive disorders) which targets multiple difficulties within a single treatment programme.

The trial is going well, and we are approaching the halfway point in terms of recruitment numbers. We also hosted a successful Conference on Transdiagnostic Approaches to Mental Health Challenges in September 2018, in order to bring together clinicians and researchers who are working in this subject area.

For more information, please visit the Cambridge Clinical Research Centre (C2:AD) website https://c2ad.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/projects/

Mood and Attention Study

We are looking to recruit people who are in recovery from depression for a questionnaire study investigating aspects of mood and attention. Interactions between mood and attention may be important in explaining why some people become caught in ongoing low mood, and we hope that understanding them better may help us to develop more specific and targeted psychological treatments in the future.

The study involves a brief telephone interview about your current mood, and a set of questionnaires which can be completed at home and posted back to us. If you would like more information, please contact anna.bevan@mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk

Upcoming Projects

These projects will start recruiting in 2019 – we'll be in touch if it looks like you may be eligible to participate, or you can email the study co-ordinator to find out more.

Self- belief in Depression Study

As humans, we not only have an idea of who we are, but also a concept of who we ideally want to be; this might be made up of the qualities we wish we had, or standards we feel we should be living up to.

It is well established that individuals with large gaps between these "actual" and "ideal" versions of themselves may be at greater risk of developing mood disorders such as depression. Despite this, we know very little about how the brain processes these different versions of self-concept.

To investigate this further, Daisy Follett, a 2nd year PhD student in the group, will be investigating people's brain activity while they reflect on the difference between their "Actual" and "Ideal" selves. She will be hoping to establish whether there are specific brain regions which are involved in these processes. If there is, this could shed light on why individuals who appear outwardly successful might still suffer mood disorders as a result of unrealistic, self-imposed standards.

Physical health and mood study

In 2019, Dr Camilla Nord, a new Investigator Scientist in the group, will be starting an exciting series of studies exploring the relationship between mood and physical health, including how the cardiovascular and immune systems contribute to emotion processing and decision-making. She'll be in touch with more information next year.

Getting support over the holidays

This time of year can be difficult for many reasons. Here are some services you can access in Cambridgeshire for extra support.

The First Response Service supports people experiencing a mental health crisis. It provides 24-hour access, seven days a week, 365 days a year. In you are feeling suicidal, please call **111**, and select **option 2**.

Samaritans If you need emotional support, or just someone to talk to, the Samaritans are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week on **116 123**.

Lifeline is also available seven days a week between 7pm–11pm on freephone **0808 808 2121.**

We wish you all the very best over the festive season and look forward to your continued involvement in our research. It is only because people such as yourself volunteering your time that this type of research is possible, and we are most grateful for your input.

With very best wishes,

The Cognition, Emotion, and Mental Health Programme

at the MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit