



**Lebanese American University**  
**Department of Social and Education Sciences**

**Senior Study (PSY 499)**

**Sexual Awareness and Attachment Anxiety/Avoidance on Sexual Satisfaction and  
Functioning**

by:  
**Tala Hashem**

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Name: Tala Hashem

Signature: Tala Hashem

Date: 08-12-2022

### **Dedication**

To everyone who supported and encouraged me in writing this piece of literature, directly or

indirectly.

First, a profound appreciation goes to the people who helped me decide on a topic (this was one of the most difficult parts for me), to the people who sent the questionnaire out to groups and posted on social media for a very efficient data collection process that took no more than two weeks, to the ones who stuck around in my thesis obsession days, and to an inspiration of mine; Andrew Huberman who is a professor of neurobiology and a passionate researcher constantly trying to increase the understanding of different constructs and expanding research globally.

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### **Abstract**

Although global research findings have been increasingly discussing sexuality and factors surrounding it, sex is still an aspect of our lives that is hugely tabooed and ghosted in our culture.

The quality of sexual relationships has multiple psychological factors affecting it, alongside the physiological. We wanted to study some of these variables affecting our culture in specific in this research paper, which include sexual awareness, attachment anxiety, and attachment avoidance. The hypotheses proposed were that sexual awareness positively correlates with the quality of sexual encounters (satisfaction and functioning), whereas attachment insecurity (anxiety/avoidance) negatively correlates with this quality. The participants tested were 18–35-year-olds, sexually active, of different genders, and were mainly university students. A questionnaire was sent to the participants testing for the four variables discussed. The scales used to measure each variable were the Sexual Awareness Scale, ECR-12 to measure attachment anxiety and avoidance, Sexual Functioning Evaluation Questionnaire, and the Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire. The data analysis comprised of two methods on SPSS-29: the Pearson correlational analysis to test the correlation between each independent variable on sexual satisfaction & functioning, and a Hierarchical Regression to compare the significance of each correlation. Results showed a strong positive correlation between sexual awareness and sexual satisfaction as predicted ( $p=.005$ ) and a strong negative correlation between attachment avoidance and satisfaction ( $p=.001$ ). A strong positive correlation was also present between avoidance and functioning ( $p=.01$ ). The hierarchical regression showed that sexual awareness significantly predicted sexual satisfaction, but a 14.7% variation was shown in the regression model of satisfaction when adding attachment avoidance and anxiety. Slightly different results were shown in the sexual functioning regression.

### **Keywords:**

Sexual Awareness, Attachment anxiety, Attachment Avoidance, Sexual Satisfaction, Sexual Functioning.

### **Introduction**

Sexuality is a topic that is awkwardly studied worldwide and is still incompletely understood. Especially within our culture as Arabs, and in many other cultures, students do not get holistic and inclusive sex education programs in schools. Sex is merely mentioned within curriculums as a physiological mechanical act and a means to an end (reproduction). Although a lot of Western countries are adjusting their sex education curriculums to fit them into the needs of young adults, there seems to be a gap in the approach. (Kantor & Linberg, 2020) In the Arab world, and Lebanon, people learn about sex from various sources, mostly in non-academic settings. Since sex is still tabooed as a topic, we don't openly engage in sexual discussions informally as well or receive the awareness that we might need for fulfilling sexual encounters. It is expected that this could have a notable impact on our sexual lives. Many questions could be posed here: when/where does a person become sexually aware in an environment that doesn't inform about sexuality? And to what extent does this affect one's sexual satisfaction and functioning?

The literature continues to explain the different variables that affect sexual experiences in relationships. In one study that aimed to understand the correlation between sexual awareness and sexual wellbeing, 26,032 worldwide participants answered the sexual well-being global survey (SWGS) electronically. The study focused on the sexual education level of the person and their opinion on the education received. The results showed that people who received formal sex education reported significantly higher sexual satisfaction levels in different parameters, compared to those who did not. (Wiley, 2010) The conclusion points towards the idea that people who get enough information about sex are significantly more likely to be satisfied in different areas of their sex life. Other studies have tested the relationship between sexual education and marital satisfaction. One of which was an experimental study conducted in Iran; it compared an experimental group (who received a sex-education course during the period of the study) to a control group who did not. A pretest and post-test in a valid scale for marital satisfaction was measured before and after being given a sex-ed course. Results showed that marital satisfaction increased after the sex education course for the experimental group. (Tonekaboni et. Al, 2013) The conclusion here resolves the question that sexual knowledge has a significant impact on marital

satisfaction between couples. In another study conducted in Iran aimed at studying sexual satisfaction in women in relation to their sexual knowledge and attitude, a strong positive association between knowledge and satisfaction was revealed, which they attributed to the better sexual attitude. (Soltani et al., 2017) In other words, the higher scores on sexual satisfaction were strongly linked to higher sexual knowledge, but more importantly to higher sexual attitudes. Attitude here, according to the researchers, could be a mediator between knowledge and satisfaction. Likewise, one research study tested the relationship between sexual education and sexual satisfaction indirectly, where the two variables were found to be strongly correlated but with sexual self-efficacy being the mediator. (Nurgitz et. Al, 2021)

On another hand, one aspect of our lives that seems to contribute a great deal to the quality of our romantic relationships is our attachment to romantic partners. The impact of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance on the quality of our romantic relationships is evident. In a parallel manner, one's attachment security/insecurity could predict the quality of his/her sexual experiences and may contribute to his/her sexual satisfaction within these intimate relationships.

Studies have shown that sexual impairment has long been associated with anxiety; performance anxiety is one of the most prominent forms of anxieties shown in sexual activities between couples. It refers to the fear that a person has of not measuring up to an expectation of a sexual encounter. This anxiety could stem from issues around body image, one's masculinity/femininity, or other aspects of the relationship itself. All of these can disrupt a normal sexual response; it can interfere with normal erection, lubrication, orgasm, and ejaculation (Rowland & Lankveld, 2019)

On a microscopic lens, how would anxiety/avoidance affect sexual functioning and satisfaction? A study was conducted to investigate the impact of attachment styles on different domains of sexual communication and satisfaction. The hypothesis was testing whether insecure attachment is associated with sexual dissatisfaction, mediated by inhibited communication of sexual needs. Inhibited communication was expected to affect deference to partner's needs, general anxiety regarding sex, concern with sexual choices within relationship, and one's feelings towards a

partner. (Davis et. Al, 2006) These, in turn, clearly affect the sexual satisfaction of a person. Generally, insecurely attached adults have a negative expectation about partners' responses to their expressed needs. The literature shows that avoidant attachment is negatively correlated with self disclosure. Moreover, insecure attachment (avoidant and anxious) is associated with seeking less support from partners in times of need, lack of assertion of preferences, self-reports of inhibited expression of needs, and failure to deal with conflict constructively. Results of this study showed that avoidance was most strongly negatively associated with the physical aspects of sexual satisfaction. Whereas anxious attachment had the strongest negative correlation with emotional aspects of sexual satisfaction. (Davis et. Al, 2006) This means that people with both avoidant and anxious attachments show a dissatisfaction with one aspect of sexual satisfaction.

Other studies go in-depth on different caregiving dimensions within the relationship and sexual indexes. One study hypothesized that caregiving behaviors mediate the association between individual's attachment insecurities and both partners' sexual satisfaction. Moreover, attachment anxiety negatively correlates with caregiving sensitivity and positively relates to caregiving control. Avoidance to be negatively correlated with proximity and sensitivity, and more positively correlated with caregiving control. These in turn predicted the levels of sexual satisfaction in men and women.

Generally, in this study, anxious people indicated less sensitivity and more controlling behaviors in their caregiving. Avoidant people indicated less caregiving proximity towards partners, but they do exert more caregiving control. (Peloquin et. Al, 2014) Caregiving proximity is known to be positively correlated with frequency of sexual intercourse (which is one predictor of sexual satisfaction). Results of this study showed that both attachment anxiety and avoidance predicted controlling caregiving, which results in lower sexual satisfaction in partners. It is important to note that control was a mediator in predicting women's sexual satisfaction but not men's. Attachment anxiety and avoidance did not directly predict sexual satisfaction in women. In men, however, attachment insecurities continued to predict sexual satisfaction after caregiving was accounted for. (Peloquin et. Al, 2014) The findings of this study were particularly interesting as they indicate

some clear differences between women's sexual satisfaction and men's when controlling for different attachment variables.

As we have understood, a lot of in-depth research has been conducted worldwide to better understand the predictors of sexual satisfaction and functioning. Direct and indirect correlational relationships were found between different variables affecting our sexual encounters. However, the significance of this data on Arab subjects is unclear since little-to-no research has been done in our region.

For this purpose, the study was conducted. Our hypotheses were: sexual awareness predicted a higher sexual satisfaction level and better functioning, and attachment anxiety and avoidance predicted a lower sexual satisfaction and functioning.

## **Methods**

### ***Participants***

The participants of this study included 101 subjects (35 males, 63 females, 2 non-binaries, and 1 preferred not to say) who were all sexually active. They were between the ages of 18 and 34 ( $M=24$ ,  $SD=3.56$ ). Moreover, there was a total of 87 Lebanese participants and 14 from other nationalities. After the approval of the ethical procedures of our study by the review board of the university, we began recruiting participants. The participants recruited were mostly university students found on campus, or enrolled through social media posts, and class WhatsApp groups. The total number of participants that answered the questionnaire was 176. For the purpose of the study, we had to eliminate 75 participants because they did not fit the criteria of our target population; they were not sexually active.

### ***Measures***

The primary outcome measures of the study were the levels of sexual satisfaction and sexual functioning of individuals. Sexual satisfaction refers to the individual degree of satisfaction with physical expression of affection, the variety of sexual activities engaged in, the sexual relationship



in general, and the perceived level of satisfaction experienced by individual within relationship.

Whereas sexual functioning refers to a measure used to understand the sexual functioning problems for an individual.

The secondary outcome measures were the sexual awareness and experience in close relationships.

The former refers to the level of knowledge and awareness one has on their general sexual states, and the latter assesses the level of anxiety and/or avoidance experienced in romantic relationships.

### ***Sexual awareness scale (SAS)***

We used the Sexual Awareness Scale to measure the level of awareness adults have on the different sexual aspects of their lives. The questionnaire consisted of 36 questions with four subscales measuring sexual-consciousness, sexual-monitoring, sexual assertiveness, and sex-appeal consciousness. Participants indicated their level of relatability to statements on a 5-point scale ranging from “not at all characteristic of me” to “very characteristic of me”. All four subscales had clearly acceptable levels of reliability with a high Cronbach alpha (above .85). (Snell, Fisher, & Miller, 1991) Some of these statements were: “I am very aware of my sexual feelings”, “I wonder if others think I’m sexy”...

### ***Experience in close relationships- short version (ECR-12)***

To measure the attachment anxiety/avoidance of our participants, we used the experience in close relationships short version scale (ECR-12 short version). It consisted of 12 items; six of which measured attachment anxiety and the other six measuring attachment avoidance. Participants indicated their level of agreement with statements on a 7-point scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. The short version of the ECR proved to have a high internal consistency, with coefficient alphas of 0.78 for anxiety and 0.84 for avoidance. (Russel et. Al, 2007) Items included: “It helps to turn to my partner in times of need” and “I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner”.

### ***Sexual Satisfaction Scale (SSS by Mieczystaw Plopa)***

We used the sexual satisfaction scale (SSS) developed by Mieczystaw Plopa from Poland, and

measuring three subscales: intimacy within relationships, caressing from foreplay, and level of satisfaction with sexual intercourse. This scale consisted of 10 statements which was scored with a 5-point scale ranging from “does not occur” to “maximum satisfaction”. The validity analysis confirms a high mean shared variance (Cronbach alpha of 0.7) which proves a satisfactory accuracy for this three-factor model in measuring sexual satisfaction. Some of the items were: “Caressing by your partner the intimate parts of your body” and “feeling your partner’s scent”.

### ***Sexual Functioning Evaluation Questionnaire (SFEQ)***

To measure sexual functioning, we used one part of the Sexual functioning Evaluation Questionnaire (that is taken from the Natsal- Sexual Functioning Scale). This part consists of 15 items measuring sexual issues, sexual relationship with partner, and perceptions of sex life. Participants answered with their level of agreement to statements with a 5-point scale ranging from “never” to “always”. Items on this scale were tested for validity and showed satisfactory results, except for one item (related to reaching climax-ejaculation). This was explained theoretically due to some people experiencing premature ejaculation and others late-to-never climax. (Mitchell et. Al, 2012) Items included: “felt anxious during sex” & “lacked interest in having sex”.

### ***Procedure***

The link to the survey was displayed on our social media platforms and sent on WhatsApp groups. Potential participants were informed of the research objectives and study details. They were also told that the questionnaire will take up to 20 minutes of their time. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured as this was a concern for some participants for the taboo nature of the topic. After that, participants read the informed consent and agreed/disagreed to participate in the study. The questionnaire consisted of some demographic questions, one of which decided whether they proceed with the survey or not as to not waste non-target participants’ time (the question was whether the participant is sexually active or not). The other questions were the items measuring the different dependent and independent variables using the scales stated above.

When importing the data to SPSS, we got to eliminate the sexually inactive participants immediately to simplify the data. We noticed that there was a good number of participants above our target age group (above 30 years). Consequently, we decided to extend the age limit to 35. The outliers of this target population (above 35 years) were removed so that the study doesn't go far off our initial target population.

### ***Data analysis strategy***

In the initial stage of the analysis process, we wanted to understand the nature of our demographics and average scale-scores. Thus, we used descriptive analysis to analyze the means, modes, minimum and maximum values, and standard deviations of the variables. Subsequently, to test the first hypothesis that sexual awareness is positively correlated with sexual satisfaction and functioning, we used a Pearson correlation test on the scores of these three scales. To test the significance of the correlation of attachment anxiety and avoidance on the same dependent variables (sexual satisfaction and functioning), we used another Pearson correlation for these three variables.

Following that, we wanted to compare the significance of the correlations between the two independent variables: sexual awareness and attachment anxiety/avoidance on the two dependent variables. In other words, we wanted to understand the hierarchy of impact on our dependent variables between sexual awareness and attachment. For that, we used a hierarchical regression for each dependent variable; one to compare the independent variables on sexual satisfaction, and another to compare the independent variables on the sexual functioning.

## **Results**

### ***Correlations between variables***

In the Pearson correlation test studying sexual awareness, sexual satisfaction, and functioning, we found a strong positive correlation between sexual awareness and sexual satisfaction,  $r(99) = .28$ ,  $p = .005$ . Also, we found a negative correlation between sexual awareness and sexual functioning, but not statistically significant,  $r(99) = -.05$ ,  $p = .62$ .

In the other Pearson correlation test studying the relationship between attachment anxiety and avoidance and the dependent variables, the results showed a strong negative correlation between attachment avoidance and sexual satisfaction,  $r(99) = -.31, p = .001$ .

Moreover, there was a significant positive correlation between attachment avoidance and sexual functioning.  $r(99) = .25, p = .01$ . Additionally, there was a positive correlation between attachment anxiety and sexual functioning, as well as between attachment anxiety and sexual satisfaction, that is not statistically significant. (See table 1)

**Table 1**  
Correlations

	Avoidance score	Anxiety score	Satisfaction Score	Sexual Functioning
Avoidance score	1	-.314**	.249*	.012
Anxiety score	-.116	1	.249	.204
Satisfaction score	.057	.127	1	.108
Sexual Functioning	-.314**	.057	-.161	1

(2-tailed) .001 .572 .108 N 101 101 101 101  
Pearson Correlation .249\* .127 -.161 1 Sig. (2-tailed) .012 .204 .108  
Pearson Correlation -.314\*\* .057 1 -.161 Sig. N 101 101 101 101

14

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### ***Hierarchical Regression***

#### ***Sexual Satisfaction Regression***

A two stage hierarchical multiple regression was conducted with Sexual Satisfaction being the dependent variable. The hierarchical multiple regression revealed that sexual awareness contributed significantly to the regression model,  $F(1,99) = 8.43, p = .005$  and accounted for 7.8% of the variation in Sexual Satisfaction. This means that the 92.2% of variation couldn't be explained by sexual awareness alone.

A different outcome was found in the second block analysis. In stage two, the Attachment variables (Avoidance and Anxiety) were entered. Introducing these variables explained an additional 14.7% of variation in Sexual Satisfaction. This change in R<sup>2</sup> was significant to the regression model, F (3, 97) = 5.56, p=.001.

The analysis of the coefficients table showed that sexual awareness significantly predicted sexual satisfaction (B=.28, t (100) = 2.90, p=.005) and avoidance also significantly predicted sexual satisfaction (B=-.26, t (100) =-2.69, p=.008). However, anxiety added to the model did not significantly produce any added variation to the satisfaction model. (See table 2)

**Table 2**

Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients			Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	6.065	.893	6.792 <.001			
				SexualAwareness	.301	.104 .280 2.904 .005
2 (Constant)	7.562	1.196	6.325 <.001			
				SexualAwareness	.241	.104 .224 2.325
				Avoidancescore	-.561	.208 -.261 -2.692 .008
				Anxietyscore	.032	.088 .035 .366 .715

a. Dependent Variable: SatisfactionScore

### ***Sexual Functioning Regression***

Another two stage hierarchical multiple regression was conducted with Sexual Functioning as the dependent variable here. Sexual Awareness was again entered at stage one, revealing a non significant contribution to the regression model of functioning, F (1,99) =.25, p=.62. Awareness accounted for 0.3% of the variation in Sexual functioning. In the second stage, the attachment variables (avoidance and anxiety) explained a significant score to the regression model, F (3, 97) = 3.09, p=.03. Adding attachment anxiety and avoidance to the first block accounted for an 8.7% variation in sexual functioning.

The analysis of the coefficients table showed that the avoidance score significantly predicted sexual satisfaction (B=.27, t (100) =2.71, p=.008). However, the other variables (awareness and

anxiety) did not significantly predict sexual functioning. (See table 3)

**Table 3**

*Coefficients<sup>a</sup>*

<u>Model</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>Unstandardized</u> <u>Coefficients</u>	<u>Std.</u> <u>Error</u>	<u>Beta</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>Sig.</u>	<u>Standardize d</u> <u>Coefficients</u>		<u>95.0% Confidence</u> <u>Interval for B</u>	
							<u>Lower</u> <u>Bound</u>	<u>Upper</u> <u>Bound</u>	<u>Lower</u> <u>Bound</u>	<u>Upper</u> <u>Bound</u>
1 (Constant)		4.617	.822		5.618	<.001	2.986	6.247		
							-.048	.095	-.504	.615
	<u>SexualAwareness</u>									
2 (Constant)		2.386	1.094		2.181	.032	.215	4.558		
							.191	.271	2.705	.008
	<u>SexualAwareness</u>									
	<u>Avoidancescore</u>						.159	1.629	.107	-.029
	<u>Anxietyscore</u>						.014	.095	.015	.148
							.883	-.174	.202	.516

a. Dependent Variable: SexualFunctioning

### Discussion

The research problem posed was examining the relationship between sexual awareness, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and sexual satisfaction and functioning. In other words, our aim was to delve deeper into the different variables affecting our sexual lives in a cultural context. In line with the hypothesis tested, the results confirmed a strong relationship between sexual awareness and sexual satisfaction. Validating the existing literature, sexual awareness could serve as a predictor for sexual satisfaction. This could be explained in two ways; with an increased knowledge of one's sexual likes and dislikes, individuals can choose to engage more in their preferences and less in sexual practices they don't like. Another lens to look at this prediction is through an interactive model; with an increase in sexual awareness and knowledge comes a decrease in performance anxiety and general anxiety around sex. This in turn can increase sexual satisfaction. Another notable take from the study is that a high predictor of sexual dissatisfaction proved to be a person's high avoidance. Based on the findings we gathered, the literature shows a

strong correlation between avoidance and inhibited sexual communication. Perhaps the mediator role of inhibited communication could serve as a valid explanation of the high negative correlation between avoidance and sexual satisfaction. Finally, in contrary to the hypothesized negative correlation between avoidance and functioning, the results show the correlation to be positive. This could be potentially explained by another theory: an avoidantly attached individual might have an avoidant attitude when evaluating their own functioning, and this is especially sensitive in the realm of sexuality. In turn, a low sexual functioning might also reinforce the avoidant attitude of the individual due to the discomfort of the topic. The results of this study generally show aligned results with the existing literature. The models proposed were missing some variables as the % of variation in the satisfaction and functioning scores was still low even after adding the three variables together, which leaves room for more independent variables affecting the studied dependents. Due to the short time given, the sample size was small to derive a general conclusion on the population. Nevertheless, this study could be duplicated on a bigger scale and controlled for confounding variables such as: prior experience in sex, history of sexual activity, sexual harassment, performance anxiety, and body image... The topic of sexuality could have a large sound in the research field that we shouldn't take for granted, as sexuality is a major part of our lives.

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## NOTICE OF IRB APPROVAL – EXEMPT STATUS

RE: IRB #: LAU.SAS.PT9.18/Oct/2022

To: Ms. Tala Hashem  
Dr. Pia Tohme  
Assistant Professor  
School of Arts and Sciences

**APPROVAL ISSUED:** 18 October 2022  
**EXPIRATION DATE:** 18 October 2024  
**REVIEW TYPE:** EXEMPT CATEGORY B

Date: October 18, 2022

**Protocol Title:** *Sexual Awareness and Attachment Anxiety on Sexual Satisfaction/Performance*

Your application for the above referenced research project has been reviewed by the Lebanese American University, Institutional Review Board (LAU IRB). This research project qualifies as exempt under the category noted in the Review Type

This notice is limited to the activities described in the Protocol Exempt Application and all submitted documents listed on page 2 of this letter. **Final reviewed consent documents or recruitment materials and data collection tools released with this notice are part of this determination and must be used in this research project.**

### **CONDITIONS FOR ALL LAU NOTICE OF IRB EXEMPTION DETERMINATION**

**LAU RESEARCH POLICIES:** *All individuals engaged in the research project must adhere to the approved protocol and all applicable LAU IRB Research Policies. PARTICIPANTS must NOT be involved in any research related activity prior to IRB notice date or after the expiration date.*

**EXEMPT CATEGORIES:** *Activities that are exempt from IRB review are not exempt from IRB ethical review and the necessity for ethical conduct.*

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**MODIFICATIONS AND AMENDMENTS:** *Certain changes may change the review criteria and disqualify the research from exemption status; therefore, any proposed changes to the previously IRB reviewed exempt study must be reviewed and cleared by the IRB before implementation.*

**RETENTION:** *Study files must be retained for a period of 3 years from the date of project completion.*

**IN THE EVENT OF NON-COMPLIANCE WITH ABOVE CONDITIONS, THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR SHOULD MEET WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE IRB OFFICE IN ORDER TO RESOLVE SUCH CONDITIONS. IRB CLEARANCE CANNOT BE GRANTED UNTIL NON-COMPLIANT ISSUES HAVE BEEN RESOLVED.**

If you have any questions concerning this information, please contact the IRB office by email at [irb@lau.edu.lb](mailto:irb@lau.edu.lb)

*The IRB operates in compliance with the national regulations pertaining to research under the Lebanese Minister of Public Health's Decision No.141 dated 27/1/2016 under LAU IRB Authorization reference 2016/3708, the international guidelines for Good Clinical Practice, the US Office of Human Research Protection (45CFR46) and the Food and Drug*

Administration (21CFR56). LAU IRB U.S. Identifier as an international institution: FWA00014723 and IRB Registration # IRB00006954 LAUIRB#1

**Dr. Joseph Stephan**  
Chair, Institutional Review Board



**DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED:**

LAU IRB Exempt Application	Received 13 October 2022
Research Protocol	Received 13 October 2022
Informed Consent	Received 13 October 2022
Link to online survey	Received 13 October 2022
CITI Training – Pia Tohme	Cert.# 33795778 Dated (22 October 2019)
CITI Training – Tala Hashem	Cert.# 51613298 Dated (29 September 2022)