

**Attitudes towards pornography among Lebanese college students: its relationship with  
sexism and gender differences.**

Ghiwa Sayde

Lebanese American University

**Attitudes towards pornography among Lebanese college students: its relationship with  
sexism and gender differences.**

**ABSTRACT.** Pornography has always been a controversial topic to discuss. Although nowadays, access and exposure to pornography have been much easier, this topic remains a taboo in the Lebanese society as a whole and among educated college students as well. This senior study aims to study the effects of gender differences and sexism on attitudes towards pornography among college students in Lebanon. The sample will consist of 154 participants from Lebanese college students. A survey containing Likert scale questions to measure sexism and attitudes towards pornography will be circulated among participants via WhatsApp and social media. SPSS will be used to test mean differences, correlations and regressions.

**KEY WORDS.** attitudes towards pornography, sexism, gender differences.

In the Lebanese society, talking about sex in general is considered a taboo, let alone talking about pornography. With the increase widespread of internet usage, watching pornography has become readily accessible. By 2017, an estimation of quarter of a billion people had accessed mobile pornography (Falzo, 2016). The widespread of pornography has affected youth in particular, as the number of young people exposed to pornography is at an ongoing increase. In search from Wright et al., 2021, 84.4% of males and 57% of females of a nationally representative estimate of U.S youths, aged between 14 and 18, were exposed to pornography. This can be further explained by the fact that adolescence and early adulthood is a period where individuals start to explore and discover their sexuality (Wallmyr and Welin, 2006).

Pornography remains a controversial topic, however, it has lately gained popularity. Consequently, researchers have endeavored to explain the effects of pornography use on the youth on social, emotional and sexual levels. However, little studies have focused on the attitudes of young people towards pornography and the variables that come into the picture. Research in this area is crucial if we are to understand the relationship between youth and pornography, and this societal phenomenon at large. Hence, the aim of this study is to examine attitudes towards pornography among Lebanese college students and its relationship with sexism and gender differences.

### **Definition of pornography**

Pornography is defined in the dictionary as “the depiction of erotic behaviour intended to cause sexual excitement” (e.g., Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, 1972). However, Hald and Malamuth’s (2008), described pornography as follows: “[pornography is] any kind of material aiming at creating or enhancing sexual feelings or thoughts in the in the recipient and, at

the same time containing explicit exposure and/or descriptions of the genitals, and clear and explicit sexual acts, such as vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, oral sex, masturbation, bondage, sadomasochism, rape, urine sex, animal sex, etc.” (p.3)

### **Attitudes towards pornography**

Attitudes, according to Hogg and Vaughan (2002, p.145), are a long-term organization of ideas, feelings, and behavioral tendencies toward socially significant objects, people, events, or symbols. On the one hand, research shows that pornography has negative consequences such as difficulties developing intimate relationships, or results in a lack of productivity or workplace issues, while on the other hand, research shows that pornography can be a form of sex education. Values, ideologies, social representations, and media, all of which are subjective to one's surroundings, as well as behavioral aspects and cognitive development, must be considered, as well as their combined effect on our attitudes.

In research from Wallmyr and Welin (2006) where 876 youths were asked about their attitudes towards pornography, the majority of females (61.0%) expressed negative opinions toward pornography in comparison to males (29.3%); 46.3% of females and 23.3% of males described pornography as "degrading." Pornography was described as "stimulating," "cool," and, most importantly, "exciting" by the majority of guys. The most negative females were the youngest. "Exciting," "cool," and "arousing" were used by older females to describe their feelings. The sentiments of the youngest boys were the most positive. The positive attitude toward pornography decreased in 16 to 19-year-olds before increasing in the eldest group. There were significant gender variations in views about pornography across all age categories.

## **Ambivalent sexism**

Any positive or negative cognitive, emotional or behavioral assessment of a person based on his gender alludes to the term “sexism” (Dueñas et al., 2020). Many contributions to the study of sexism were made, one of which is the ambivalent sexism theory. This theory suggests that ambivalent sexism consists of a two-dimensional form that includes two different sexist views: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Both sexist views form a punishment-reward construct and are complementary to a certain extent. Benevolent sexism is viewing women in a positive way by assigning to them typical social roles (Glick & Fiske, 1996). In a prosocial context, benevolent sexism is a set of positive attitudes (rewards) towards women who succeed in their social roles, roles that are subjectively positive to the perceiver and tend to elicit typical social stereotypes of a woman’s qualities such as intimacy, motherhood, care, etc... In benevolent sexism, we find the urge and the necessity to care for and protect these women who succeed in fulfilling their prosocial roles as mothers, wives, and caregivers (Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2021). Despite the positive attitudes of the perceiver, benevolent sexism is still sexism for its underpinning components of stereotyping and masculine dominance (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Hostile sexism on the other hand, is a more traditional form of sexism, as it focuses on the inferiority of women compared to men in all aspects (Dueñas et al., 2020). As opposed to benevolent sexism, hostile sexism holds negative attitudes towards women; men perceive themselves as superior to women and find it crucial to exercise their power over them -as they consider themselves the power holders- in a way to assure the continuity of women’s inferiority in all aspects of life.

## **Hypotheses**

H1: High hostile sexism score will positively correlate with positive attitudes towards pornography.

H2: High benevolent sexism score will negatively correlate with positive attitudes towards pornography.

H3: There will be a difference in attitudes towards pornography between men and women.

## **Methodology**

### **Sample**

The sample consists of 154 participants from the Lebanese population covering an age range from 18 to 30 years ( $M= 21.7$   $SD=2.29$ ), including both men and women 86 and 64 respectively and 4 responses as other; all speakers recruited through a convenience sample.

### **Instruments**

Attitudes Toward Pornography Scale (Whatley, 2019). The attitudes toward pornography were measured using a 20-item questionnaire. "Viewing pornography is a fun way to relieve stress," "Pornography leads to rape," and "Individuals who engage in pornography are unsuccessful" are some of the items on the scale. Participants' responses were recorded on a seven-point linear scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree) (strongly agree). The total score varies from 20 to 140. The items that contained negative statements were reversed, with higher scores indicating more positive opinions about pornography. The scale's reliability was 0.84. Using Cronbach's alpha (0.74), this scale has appropriate psychometric properties for the current investigation.

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) (Glick and Fiske, 1996). This instrument has 22 items (Cronbach = 0.90) on ambivalent sexism, which are divided into two scales: The first scale has 11 items that refer to hostile sexism (Cronbach = 0.89) and the second scale has 11 items that refer to benevolent sexism (Cronbach = 0.86). The item response format is a Likert-type scale with response possibilities ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating higher degrees of sexism.

### **Procedure**

The survey was provided through an online link using snowball technique; the questionnaire was 60 items long and 154 people completed it. Upon accessing the link participants first see the consent form, once the check box of consent is clicked, they proceed to the following sections order: the sociodemographic section; the attitudes toward pornography scale, the ambivalent sexism inventory, 9 questions related to opinions on pornography, and finally, 2 questions asking participants whether they watch pornography and the frequency.

### **Results**

Among the 154 participants, 81% reported they watched pornography, of which 10.4% reported they watched pornography on a daily basis, 44% on a weekly basis, 22.4% on a monthly basis and 23.2% rarely.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the difference in attitudes towards pornography between men and women in the Attitudes Toward Pornography Scale. There was a significant difference in the scores of the following questions “Those who view pornography

have low self-esteem”, “People who create pornography have low self-esteem”, “pornography leads to rape”, “Viewing pornography can be a healthy way to explore one’s sexuality” between men and women, where for the first two questions, the mean score were significantly higher among women ( $M= 2.5$   $SD=0.75$ ) and ( $M= 2.7$   $SD=0.64$ ) respectively than among men ( $M= 2.3$   $SD=0.90$ ) and ( $M= 2.4$   $SD=0.78$ ) respectively;  $t(148) = 1.63, p < .05$  and  $t(146) = 2.07, p < .05$  respectively. Whereas for the last two questions those of men were significantly higher ( $M= 2.6$   $SD=0.73$ ) and ( $M= 2.4$   $SD=0.83$ ) respectively than for women ( $M= 2.4$   $SD=0.83$ ) and ( $M= 2.2$   $SD=0.93$ ) respectively;  $t(148) = -1.7, p < .05$  and  $t(147) = -1.0, p < .05$  respectively (see Table1).

Moreover, there was a significant difference of score between men and women for the following questions as well, “ Pornography gives men false expectations about their partner”, “Pornography gives women false expectations about their partner”, “Pornography releases sexual tension” where for the first two questions, the mean score were significantly higher among women ( $M= 2.8$   $SD=0.58$ ) and ( $M= 2.6$   $SD=0.73$ ) respectively than among men ( $M= 2.6$   $SD=0.70$ ) and ( $M= 2.3$   $SD=0.85$ ) respectively;  $t(146) = 1.26, p < .05$  and  $t(145) = 1.69, p < .05$  respectively. Whereas for the last question those of men were significantly higher ( $M= 2.7$   $SD=0.58$ ) than for women ( $M= 2.6$   $SD=0.70$ );  $t(146) = -1.23, p < .05$  (see Table 1).

In addition, there was a significant difference of total score for the Attitudes Towards Pornography Scale between people who watch pornography and those who do not. The mean score were significantly higher among people who watched pornography ( $M= 2.6$   $SD=0.58$ ) than among those who do not ( $M= 1.7$   $SD=0.75$ );  $t(151) = 6.85, p < .05$  (see figure 1).



As per the Ambivalent Sexism Scale, there was a significant difference of score between men and women for the following two questions, “Women should be cherished and protected by men”, “Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well-being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives”, where the mean score were significantly higher among men for both ( $M= 2.9$   $SD=1.31$ ) and ( $M= 1.7$   $SD=1.45$ ) respectively than among women ( $M= 2.7$   $SD=1.64$ ) and ( $M= 1.2$   $SD=1.20$ ) respectively;  $t(146) = -0.85, p < .05$  and  $t(141) = -2.08, p < .05$  respectively. In addition, there was a significant difference in hostile sexism score between men ( $M= 1.6$   $SD=0.70$ ) and women ( $M= 1.3$   $SD=0.48$ );  $t(148) = -3.77, p < .05$  where men scored higher (see Table 1).

Benevolent sexism was found to be negatively correlated with attitudes towards pornography ( $r = -.43, p < .01$ ).

As per the last part of the questionnaire, 48.3% of the participants agreed that pornography degrades women, whereas 27.2% agreed that pornography degrades men. 82.2% agreed that pornography gives men false expectations about their partner, and 66.2% agreed that pornography gives women false expectations about their partner. In addition, 53.3% agreed that pornography leads to sexual addiction, whereas 30.3% agreed that pornography is educational. Moreover, 54.3% agreed that pornography increases violence towards women, 74.3% agreed that pornography releases sexual tension, and 30.5% agreed that pornography breaks down family structure.

## **Discussion**

Although the frequency of pornographic use was not correlated to attitudes towards pornography in this study, starting with these data could lay the groundwork for a variety of

related arguments. Males were found to view pornography significantly more frequently than females, corresponding to earlier findings in numerous studies (e.g. Carroll et al., 2008; Johansson & Hammarén 2007; Pornography Statistics, 2015; Sirianni & Vishwanath, 2015). Although women may have a more open-minded attitude toward pornography than in the past (Johansson & Hammarén, 2007), men are still more likely to use it because pornography is still targeted at men and men are attracted to a wider range of hard-core pornography (Hald, 2006; Rimmer, 1984 as cited in Olmstead et al., 2012). In addition, some have stated that pornographic viewing is strongly linked to gender norms (Johansson & Hammarén, 2007; Lopez and George, 1995; Peterson and Hyde, 2010), with women potentially conforming to exaggerated gender stereotypes, as highlighted by Peterson and Hyde (2010).

It has been discovered that the participants have varying attitudes towards pornography, with the most widely held belief being that “pornography gives men false expectations about their partners”. This finding suggests that, regardless of one's perception, it is critical to be aware of the negative consequences that can arise from using the material, as discussed in various studies (e.g. Carroll et al., 2008; HaggstromNordin et al., 2006; Hald, Malamuth & Yuen, 2010; Krafka et al., 1997; Zillman, 2000). This finding suggests that the general population is more knowledgeable and open to problematic matters, implying that pornography (or maybe other controversial issues) should be viewed critically rather than negatively due to its controversial aspect. Here, one can examine the role of sex education in the construction of knowledge, critical thinking, and sexual behavior attitudes, which is why some countries are including 'Porn Literacy' into their educational systems (Sirianni & Vishwanath, 2015).

There was a significant difference in attitudes towards pornography between men and women in 7 out of 29 statements that tackled the attitudes towards pornography, this implies that men and

women have similar attitudes towards pornography in 22 out of 29 statements. These results did not support our third hypotheses (H3).

Benevolent sexism was found to be negatively correlated with attitudes towards pornography, these findings support our second hypothesis (H2). Benevolent sexism is a more subtle form of sexism that appears to be positive. It is conveyed by men emphasizing their responsibility in protecting and providing for women by placing them on a chivalrous pedestal. Women receive this protection and love in exchange for adhering to traditional gender roles. This type of sexism is fueled by paternal and traditional attitudes that see women as beautiful and pure, yet sensitive and valuable, and so in need of male protection (Mastari et al., 2019), this can explain the fact that the more the person shows benevolent sexism, the more his attitude towards pornography will be negative.

There was no correlation between hostile sexism and attitudes towards pornography. These results did not support our first hypothesis (H1). However, there was a significant difference of hostile sexism score between men and women with men scoring higher. Both genders support benevolent sexism because it is a more socially acceptable form of sexism than hostile sexism. Across various countries, it has been established that both men and women score above average on the benevolent sexism scale. Men and boys consistently outperform women and girls when it comes to hostile sexism (Mastari et al., 2019).

In this study, we are targeting the Lebanese population, especially the youth. With that being said, we cannot close an eye on the cultural aspect of the society. In Lebanon and the Arab region generally, for nonmarital sexual interactions, boys and males are thought to gain praise and positive attributions from others, whereas girls and women are supposed to be derogated and

stigmatized. To put it another way, men are rewarded for sexual behavior whereas women are punished for it. The sexual double standard stems from gender stereotypes: sex and desire are not considered feminine, but are expected from men (Gesser-Edelsburg et al., 2018). This can further explain the difference in percentages of the participants who agreed that pornography degrades women and those who agreed that it degrades men, and of those who agreed that pornography gives men false expectations about their partner and vice-versa.

### **Limitations and future research**

A limitation can be due to the sample size which may be the cause of the few correlations extracted from the literature review. In addition, a longer version of the attitudes towards pornography scale could have been useful to study the subparts of pornography that could be related to violence, culture, legislation, etc... Furthermore, because the study did not ask about diverse sexual orientations, it could only take the perspective of heterosexual individuals or couples, which is similar to the majority of previous research. Furthermore, the study focused on pornography as a whole rather than the views of students toward various types of pornography.

Future research will benefit from targeting a larger sample from different age groups and socio-demographic diversity. Moreover, studying external factors and variables that could affect attitudes towards pornography may permit more detailed investigation of the topic.

### **Conclusion**

While some of the findings were expected and in line with past research, some were unexpected, such as males and females having similar attitudes toward the majority of the statements.

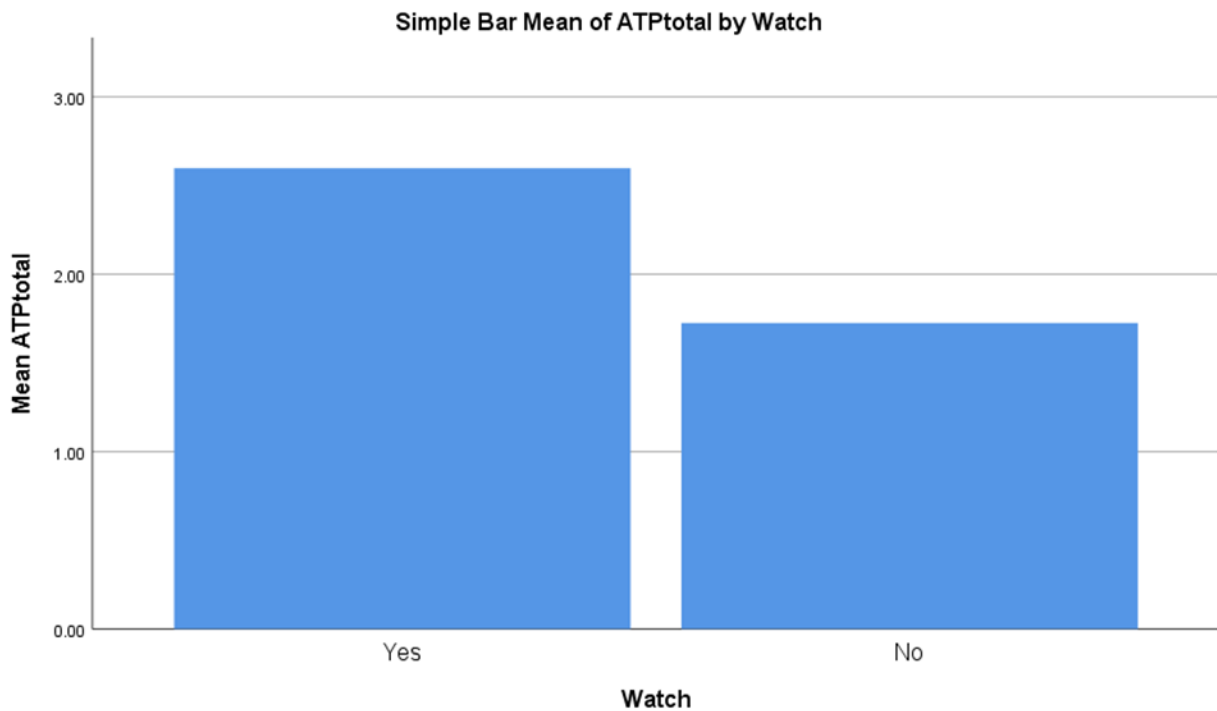
Finally, this study has improved local research in the topic of sexuality, notably in the area of pornography, and has made some recommendations for future additional or new research that will help to advance the field's understanding. More research is needed in the field of psychology, particularly in the areas of psychotherapy and sexology in relation to pornography.

## Appendix 1

Table 1 *Mean, standard deviation and t values of Gender on ATP and ASI scales.*

| Items  | Men           | Women        | t     | df  | p-value    |
|--|---------------|--------------|-------|-----|------------|
|  | Mean<br>(SD)  | Mean<br>(SD) |       |     |            |
| Those who view pornography have low self-esteem  | 2.3<br>(0.90) | 2.5 (0.75)   | 1.63  | 148 | 0.003      |
| People who create pornography have low self-esteem   | 2.4<br>(0.78) | 2.7 (0.64)   | 2.07  | 146 | 0.004      |
| Pornography leads to rape  | 2.6<br>(0.73) | 2.4 (0.83)   | -1.7  | 148 | 0.019      |
| Viewing pornography can be a healthy way to explore one's sexuality  | 2.4<br>(0.83) | 2.2 (0.93)   | -1.0  | 147 | 0.018      |
| Pornography gives men false expectations about their partner   | 2.6<br>(0.70) | 2.8 (0.58)   | 1.26  | 146 | 0.021      |
| Pornography gives women false expectations about their partner   | 2.3<br>(0.85) | 2.6 (0.73)   | 1.69  | 145 | 0.011      |
| Pornography releases sexual tension  | 2.7<br>(0.58) | 2.6 (0.70)   | -1.23 | 146 | 0.023      |
| Women should be cherished and protected by men   | 2.9<br>(1.31) | 2.7 (1.64)   | -0.85 | 146 | 0.006      |
| Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well-being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives | 1.7<br>(1.45) | 1.2 (1.20)   | -2.08 | 141 | 0.040      |
| Hostile sexism   | 1.6<br>(0.70) | 1.3 (0.48)   | -3.77 | 148 | <<br>0.001 |

Figure 1 simple bar mean of ATP total by Watch.



## References

- Dueñas, J. M., Santiago-Larrieu, B., Ferre-Rey, G., & Cosi, S. (2020). Ambivalent sexism in adolescence: The relationship between family socialization styles and ambivalent sexism in adolescence. *Interpersona: An International Journal on Personal Relationships*, 14(1), 28–39. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ijpr.v14i1.3923>
- Falzon, Nicola. (2016). University Students' Attitudes towards Pornography; A Comparative Study. 10.13140/RG.2.2.17351.44966.
- Garos, S., Beggan, J. K., Kluck, A., & Easton, A. (2004). Sexism and Pornography Use. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, 16(1), 69–96. [https://doi.org/10.1300/j056v16n01\\_05](https://doi.org/10.1300/j056v16n01_05)

Gesser-Edelsburg, A., & Abed Elhadi Arabia, M. (2018). Discourse on Exposure to Pornography Content Online Between Arab Adolescents and Parents: Qualitative Study on its Impact on Sexual Education and Behavior. *Journal of medical Internet research*, 20(10), e11667.

<https://doi.org/10.2196/11667>

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1996). The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70(3), 491–512.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.70.3.491>

Kumar, P., Patel, V. K., Bhatt, R. B., Vasavada, D. A., Sangma, R. D., & Tiwari, D. S. (2021). Prevalence of Problematic Pornography Use and Attitude Toward Pornography Among the Undergraduate Medical Students. *Journal of Psychosexual Health*, 3(1), 29–36.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2631831821989677>

Mastari, L., Spruyt, B., & Siongers, J. (2019). Benevolent and Hostile Sexism in Social Spheres: The Impact of Parents, School and Romance on Belgian Adolescents' Sexist Attitudes. *Frontiers in sociology*, 4, 47. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2019.00047>

Rodríguez-Castro, Y., Martínez-Román, R., Alonso-Ruido, P., Adá-Lameiras, A., & Carrera-Fernández, M. V. (2021). Intimate Partner Cyberstalking, Sexism, Pornography, and Sexting in Adolescents: New Challenges for Sex Education. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(4), 2181. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18042181>

Wallmyr, G., & Welin, C. (2006). Young People, Pornography, And Sexuality: Sources And Attitudes. *The Journal of School Nursing*, 22(5), 290–295.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/10598405060220050801>

Wright PJ, Paul B, Herbenick D. Preliminary Insights from a U.S. Probability Sample on Adolescents' Pornography Exposure, Media Psychology, and Sexual Aggression. *J Health*

Commun. 2021 Jan 2;26(1):39-46. doi: 10.1080/10810730.2021.1887980. Epub 2021 Feb 24.

PMID: 33625313.



## NOTICE OF IRB EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

**To:** Ms. Ghiwa Sayde  
Dr. Myriam El Khoury Malhame  
Assistant Professor  
School of Arts & Sciences

**NOTICE ISSUED:** 28 February 2022  
**EXPIRATION DATE:** 28 February 2024  
**REVIEW TYPE:** EXEMPT CATEGORY B

**Date:** February 28, 2022

**RE:** **IRB #:** LAU.SAS.MM4.28/Feb/2022

**Protocol Title:** Attitudes towards Pornography among Lebanese College Students: Its Relationship With Sexism And Gender Differences

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 & PROCEDURES:** All individuals engaged in the research project must adhere to the approved protocol and all applicable LAU IRB Research Policies & Procedures. **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.

**PROTOCOL EXPIRATION:** **PROTOCOL EXPIRATION:** The LAU IRB notice expiry date for studies that fall under Exemption is 2 years after this notice, as noted above. If the study will continue beyond this date, a request for an extension must be submitted at least 2 weeks prior to the Expiry date.

**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 Protocol Application                             | Received 15 February 2022  |
| Research Protocol   | Received 15 February 2022  |
| Survey Advertisement  | Received 15 February 2022  |
| Informed Consent Form   | Received 15 February 2022  |
| Survey Questions  | Received 15 February 2022  |
| Link to online survey   | Received 15 February 2022  |
| <b>IRB Comments sent:</b><br>5 January 2022<br>16 February 2022 | <b>PI response to IRB's comments dated:</b><br>8 February 2022<br>21 February 2022 |
| NIH Training – Myriam El Khoury Malhame                         | Cert.# 2688606 Dated (27 March 2018)   |
| CITI Training – Ghiwa Sayde                                     | Cert.# 40923534 Dated (2 March 2021)   |

