

## **Participant Information Sheet – Experiment 1**

### **Study Title: Testing an AI Emotional Support Companion Compared to Group Therapy for Student Wellbeing**

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Anat Shoshani

**Institution:** Reichman University

**IRB Reference:** P\_2024178

**Contact:** ashoshani@runi.ac.il | +972 9 9602887

#### **What is this study about?**

You are invited to take part in a study exploring how effective a digital emotional support companion, called Kai, is in improving mental health and well-being among university students who feel they need emotional support. This study compares Kai with group therapy and a waitlist control group.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you participate, you will be randomly assigned to one of three groups for 12 weeks:

- Kai AI Group: You will be given access to Kai, an AI companion that offers supportive conversations based on psychological principles. Using Kai is flexible, but we recommend engaging with it at least 3 times per week for 10–15 minutes per session.
- Group Therapy Group: You will attend 12 weekly group sessions (90 minutes each) led by a licensed psychologist. Sessions will include CBT, ACT, and mindfulness-based activities.
- Waitlist Group: You will not receive an intervention during the study period but will be offered access to Kai group after the study ends.
- You will complete brief online questionnaires before and after the 12-week period (approx. 20 minutes each time).
- Participants will receive academic credits for their participation as part of university coursework requirements.

#### **Who can participate?**

University students aged 18–35  
Feel a need for emotional support  
Self-report mild-to-moderate emotional distress  
Fluent in Hebrew  
Not currently in therapy or taking psychiatric medication  
Able to attend in-person sessions (if assigned to group therapy)

#### **Are there any risks?**

Some topics in the app or therapy sessions may be emotionally sensitive. The study is not intended for students in acute psychiatric crisis or experiencing active suicidal thoughts. All participants will be screened prior to inclusion, and those in crisis will be referred to appropriate services. If you experience distress during the study, our clinical team is available to provide support and referrals. You may stop participation at any time without explanation.

#### **What are the benefits?**

Participants may experience improvements in well-being, reduced stress, or anxiety relief. You will also contribute to advancing digital mental health tools for students.

#### **Will my data be kept confidential?**

Yes. Your data will be anonymized, encrypted, and stored securely. Only the research team will have access. Data used in publications will not identify you in any way.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

No. Participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without giving a reason, and this will not affect your rights or academic standing.

#### **What if I have more questions?**

You may contact Prof. Anat Shoshani at ashoshani@runi.ac.il or +972 9 9602887.

## Participant Information Sheet – Experiment 2

### Study Title: Testing an AI Emotional Support Companion Compared to University Counseling Services

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Anat Shoshani

**Institution:** Reichman University

**IRB Reference:** P\_2024178

**Contact:** ashoshani@runi.ac.il | +972 9 9602887

#### What is this study about?

This study compares a digital emotional support companion (Kai) with university counseling services to see which method is more effective in supporting students' mental health. It is designed for students who feel they would benefit from emotional support.

#### What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate, you will be randomly assigned to one of the following groups for a 12-week period:

- Kai AI Group: Use the AI companion Kai at your convenience. Usage is flexible, but we suggest engaging at least 3 times per week for 10–15 minutes to gain full benefit.
  - University Counseling Group: Attend weekly one-on-one therapy sessions through the Student Counseling Services for 3 months.
  - Waitlist Control Group: No intervention for 12 weeks. You'll receive access to Kai after the study.
- All participants will fill out digital questionnaires at the beginning and end of the study. These surveys take about 20 minutes to complete.
- Participants will receive academic credits for their participation as part of university coursework requirements.

#### Who can take part?

- Students aged 18–35
- Feel a need for emotional support
- Fluent in Hebrew
- Experiencing mild-to-moderate emotional distress
- Eligible for counseling services but not currently enrolled
- Have not used counseling services in the past year

#### What are the potential risks and benefits?

Some psychological topics may cause discomfort. This study is not suitable for students experiencing a psychiatric crisis or active suicidal ideation. Anyone identified as at risk during screening will be referred to clinical care. Our clinical staff are available to assist if you feel overwhelmed during the study. Potential benefits include greater mental well-being and improved coping strategies.

#### How will my information be protected?

All information is confidential. Your name will not appear in any reports. Data will be stored securely and handled according to strict ethical and data protection standards.

#### Do I have to participate?

No. You can decline or stop participating at any time. This will not affect your access to university services or academic status.

#### What if I need more information?

Contact Prof. Anat Shoshani (ashoshani@runi.ac.il) or +972 9 9602887 with any questions or concerns.