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Dr. Sai Sanjay Kadam
Dr. D. Y. Patil Homoeopathic
Medical College and Research
Centre, Sant Tukaram Nagar,
Pimpri, Pune, Maharashtra,
India

The function of homeopathy in mental health: An alternative method for anxiety and depression

Sai Sanjay Kadam

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Abstract

The use of homeopathy as a complementary medicine for the treatment of mental health issues, especially depression and anxiety, has been growing in popularity. There are still issues with accessibility, side effects, and personalized patient responses with traditional treatments like psychotherapy and pharmaceutical interventions, despite their effectiveness. Personalized treatment plans that take into account the patient's emotional, psychological, and physiological needs are available with homeopathy, which is based on the "like cures like" principle. The scientific evidence is still inconclusive due to methodological limitations and contradictory findings, although some studies have shown that remedies like *Aconitum Napellus*, *Argentum Nitricum*, and *Ignatia Amara* may have potential anxiolytic and antidepressant effects. Due to its low-risk profile and holistic approach, homeopathy continues to attract interest, despite skepticism regarding its mechanism, especially concerns related to extreme dilutions. This article examines the role of homeopathy in mental health by reviewing relevant empirical research, clinical trials, and patient outcomes with a critical eye. Although homeopathy has the potential to alleviate symptoms for some people, the results indicate that further large-scale, scientific studies are needed to confirm its effectiveness. Finding out how homeopathy fits into integrated mental health care requires standardized methodologies and comparisons with conventional treatments, according to the study.

Keywords: Homeopathy, mental health, anxiety, depression, alternative medicine, individualized treatment, complementary therapy, holistic health, placebo effect, clinical trials

Introduction

Depression and anxiety are two of the most common mental health issues today, and they have a major influence on people's emotional health, ability to go about their everyday lives normally, and quality of life in general. Physical manifestations of anxiety include racing thoughts, agitation, and trouble focusing, in addition to the mental symptoms of excessive worry, fear, and apprehension. Persistent sadness, changes in appetite and sleep patterns, exhaustion, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, and a lack of interest or pleasure in once-enjoyed activities are all symptoms of depression. When both conditions manifest at the same time or at different times, it becomes more difficult to diagnose and treat the patient. These disorders bear a heavy burden on a global scale ^[1]. In 2019, about 280 million people, or about 5% of the adult population, suffered from depression, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). A major cause of disability on a global scale, depression disproportionately affects women. Nearly 15% of Indian adults need active treatment for one or more mental health issues, with one in twenty individuals suffering from depression, according to the National Mental Health Survey 2015-16 in India. Moreover, over 258,000 people committed suicide in India in 2012, with the majority of victims falling within the 15-49 age bracket. Anxiety and depression are already very common, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only made them worse. Worldwide, the incidence of these diseases surged by 25% in the first year of the pandemic, according to a WHO scientific brief. Isolation, fear of infection, loss of loved one, and financial concerns are some of the factors that contribute to this surge ^[2]. Strong mental health services and support networks are essential, as the pandemic has shown. Psychotherapy, medicine, and behavioral changes are all part of the toolbox when it comes to treating mental health issues like anxiety and depression. People with these disorders have found success in recognizing and altering maladaptive patterns of thinking and behavior through psychotherapy, especially cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). Medications for depression can also be helpful, but it is important to consider the

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Sai Sanjay Kadam
Dr. D. Y. Patil Homoeopathic
Medical College and Research
Centre, Sant Tukaram Nagar,
Pimpri, Pune, Maharashtra,
India

possible side effects and the fact that their efficacy varies from person to person. Mindfulness, yoga, and physical activity are examples of complementary therapies that have demonstrated potential in promoting better mental health and reducing symptoms. Access to mental health care is still severely limited, especially in low- and middle-income nations, even though these treatments are readily available. According to the World Health Organization, over 75% of individuals in these areas who suffer from mental disorders do not receive any form of treatment. Problems arise due to widespread stigma, inadequate funding, and a shortage of qualified healthcare professionals. Raising public awareness, decreasing stigma, improving access to mental health services, and integrating mental health care into primary healthcare systems are all parts of a holistic, multi-pronged strategy to combat anxiety and depression. Another factor that has contributed to the decline in the prevalence of these disorders is the implementation of preventative measures, such as programs in schools that aim to teach kids and teens to think more positively.

Understanding Homeopathy

A system of alternative and complementary medicine known as homeopathy, which was founded by Samuel Hahnemann in the late 18th century, is based on the principle of "similia similibus curentur," or "like cures like." This basic principle states that substances that can cause certain symptoms in healthy people can, when given to sick people in very diluted form, alleviate those same symptoms. Homeopathy is a highly personalized therapeutic approach that takes into account the patient's emotional, psychological, and physiological states to choose the most suitable remedies. The potentization process, which entails vigorously shaking a substance and serially diluting it, is fundamental to homeopathic medication. The rationale behind this approach is that it will reduce the remedy's possible toxicity while simultaneously increasing its therapeutic efficacy. Skeptics frequently raise the possibility that homeopathic remedies do not contain any molecules of the original substance due to the extremely high levels of dilution used in them. This raises questions about how these remedies work. Numerous studies have been carried out by the scientific community to assess the effectiveness of homeopathy. Fifty of the 93 RCTs that evaluated homeopathy for clinical outcomes reported significant benefits, forty-one showed no differences between the homeopathy and control groups, and two showed worse results with homeopathy^[3]. Notable treatment effects were noted in conditions such as sprains, upper respiratory tract infections, fibrositis, hay fever, influenza, various types of pain, side effects of radio- or chemotherapy, and childhood diarrhea. When it came to conditions like headaches, stroke, or warts, however, the evidence was against efficacy. Previous studies have only scratched the surface of homeopathic studies. Nearly three-quarters of the 329 clinical studies that were published in peer-reviewed journals were RCTs, which are the most prestigious form of clinical research. Roughly one hundred medical issues were addressed in the 166 randomized, placebo-controlled trials. These were the results: Among those who tested homeopathy, 42% found positive results, suggesting its efficacy; 3% found negative results, indicating its ineffectiveness; and 55% were unable to draw any conclusions. More extensive and rigorous research are

required to draw firmer conclusions regarding the effectiveness of homeopathy in light of these results^[4]. The assessment of patient outcomes in real-world settings has been done through both clinical trials and observational studies. For example, one study indicated that patients with chronic musculoskeletal disorders who were treated by homeopathic doctors used half as much conventional pain medication as those who were not. Although further controlled trials are needed to validate these findings, these findings do point to the possibility that homeopathic treatment could help decrease dependence on conventional medications. These investigations have not resolved the scientific mystery surrounding the processes that give rise to homeopathy's therapeutic benefits. Some have speculated that the solvent undergoes structural changes, that water used in dilutions may retain a "memory" of the original substance, and that quantum entanglement models could be at play. There is still no universally acknowledged theoretical framework for homeopathy, and the fact that none of these theories have been proved or disproven is a major obstacle to its incorporation into conventional medicine^[5].

Homeopathic Remedies for Anxiety and Depression

Several homeopathic remedies are traditionally used to address symptoms of anxiety and depression:

- **Aconitum Napellus (Aconite):** Aconitum napellus, commonly known as Aconite, is a homeopathic remedy traditionally used for acute anxiety episodes characterized by sudden onset, intense fear, restlessness, and physical symptoms like palpitations. A 2009 double-blind, placebo-controlled crossover study investigated the short-term reactions of healthy volunteers to Aconitum napellus C30. The study found significant differences between responses to the homeopathic dilution and placebo, suggesting a distinct effect of the remedy. However, a systematic review of homeopathy for anxiety and anxiety disorders concluded that evidence supporting its efficacy is limited, with randomized controlled trials reporting contradictory results and methodological shortcomings. Therefore, while some studies indicate potential benefits, the overall scientific evidence remains inconclusive^[6, 7].
- **Argentum Nitricum (Argentum Nit):** Homeopathic silver nitrate, or Argentum nitricum, has a long history of use in treating anxious feelings like nervous anticipation and dread. Examining its effectiveness on test anxiety among college students, a 2003 double-blind, placebo-controlled trial discovered no statistically significant difference between the two groups. On the other hand, results from a 2018 rodent study showed that Argentum nitricum 30C had strong anxiolytic effects, such as less head dips and more time spent in light environments. We need more thorough studies to determine whether Argentum nitricum is beneficial in treating anxiety, since these results are contradictory^[8, 9].
- **Arsenicum Album (Arsenicum Alb):** Homeopathic arsenic trioxide arsenate, or Arsenicum Album, has a long history of use in the treatment of depressive and anxious disorders marked by hyperactivity, health-related phobias, and a desire for perfection. There is little evidence that homeopathy is effective for anxiety

disorders, according to a systematic review that analyzed eight randomized controlled trials. The results of these trials were inconsistent, and the studies had methodological limitations. Results showed that both the homeopathy and placebo groups, which included 44 patients with GAD, improved significantly; however, there was no statistically significant difference between the two. Overall, 58% of 12 adults treated with individualized homeopathic remedies, including Arsenicum Album, for depression or anxiety disorders showed improvement; however, this study's limitations include a small sample size and the absence of a control group. When it comes to anxiety and depression, the available research does not strongly suggest that Arsenicum Album is effective [7, 10, 11].

- **Gelsemium Sempervirens (Gelsemium):**

Homeopaths use Gelsemium sempervirens, more often known as yellow jasmine, for its supposed calming effects. A study published in *Phytotherapy Research* examined different extracts of *G. sempervirens* roots and rhizomes. The results showed that the methanol extract, at 150 mg/kg, had anxiolytic effects similar to diazepam, as it significantly increased the number of open arm entries and the amount of time spent in the open arms in the elevated plus maze test. Another research in Homeopathy looked at homeopathic dilutions of *G. sempervirens* in mice and found that some of the dilutions made them spend more time in the light part of the light-dark test, which could mean that they have some kind of anxiolytic effect. In contrast, neither *G. sempervirens* 5CH nor 15CH nor a placebo significantly reduced anticipation anxiety in a randomized, placebo-controlled study of healthy volunteers. These contradictory findings highlight the necessity for additional thorough investigation to determine *G. sempervirens*' effectiveness in alleviating anxiety [12-14].

- **Ignatia Amara (Ignatia):** A homeopathic remedy for anxiety and depression, Ignatia amara is made from the seeds of *Strychnos ignatii*. Some dilutions, especially 9C, showed anxiolytic-like activity without affecting locomotion, according to a study by Marzotto *et al.* (2012) that used behavioral models to assess its effects on mice. But studies conducted by Bhat *et al.* (2021) on Wistar rats exposed to chronic unpredictable stress found no evidence that Ignatia 12CH significantly reduced anxiety. Increased swimming time and reduced struggling behavior were indicators of antidepressant-like effects in rodents, according to Anser *et al.* (2020). Further rigorous research is needed to determine the effectiveness and underlying mechanisms of Ignatia amara, as these mixed findings indicate that it shows potential in managing anxiety and depression [15, 16].

Objective of the study

Review of the Function of Homeopathy in Mental Health: An Alternative Method for Anxiety and Depression.

Methodology

This study examines homeopathy's function in mental health, particularly as an alternate treatment for depression and anxiety, through the lens of a qualitative review methodology. An extensive search of credible databases like Google Scholar, Scopus, and PubMed is required, as is a

systematic review of relevant peer-reviewed journals, clinical trials, and meta-analyses. Examining homeopathic principles, mechanisms, and patient outcomes in comparison to conventional treatments, the research provides a critical evaluation. Anecdotal or unverified reports are eliminated by exclusion criteria, while studies with empirical evidence are focused on by inclusion criteria. This review synthesises the research on homeopathy in order to draw conclusions about its usefulness, limitations, and possible incorporation into comprehensive mental healthcare systems.

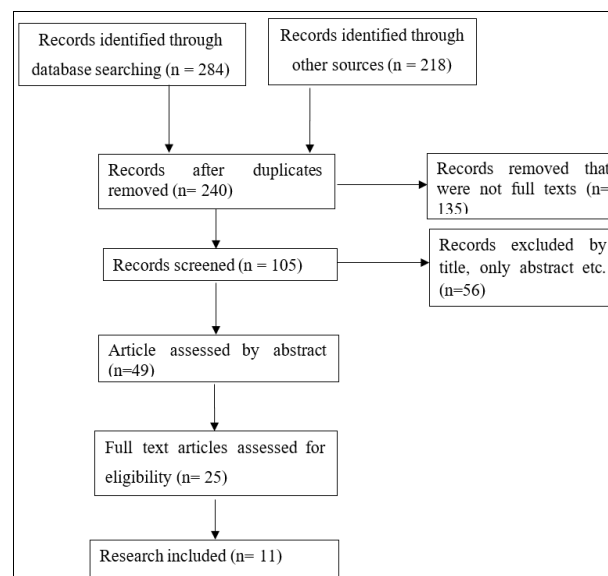


Fig 1: Prisma chart

Review of Literature

(Moorthi & P, 2023) [17] This case report highlights the successful management of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (G.A.D.) using individualized homeopathic treatment. G.A.D., a chronic and recurrent condition marked by excessive worry and a significant impact on quality of life, lacks extensive research in homeopathy. The study presents a 36-year-old male patient experiencing severe anxiety, irritability, palpitations, gastric issues, excessive sweating, sleep disturbances, and concentration difficulties. Following a thorough case assessment, treatment with Lycopodium 200C and Sulphur 1000C led to remarkable symptom relief, with complete remission observed by the 10th month of treatment. The patient's functional and social well-being significantly improved, as evidenced by the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale, and no relapse occurred for eight months. This report underscores the potential efficacy of homeopathy in managing G.A.D., demonstrating substantial improvement in the patient's personal and professional life without adverse effects.

(Moorthi *et al.*, 2022) [18] The study explores the scope of homeopathy in treating depression, a significant public health concern due to its high prevalence, morbidity, and economic impact. By analyzing 21 studies, including systematic reviews, randomized control trials, observational studies, and case reports published between 2001 and 2021, the review highlights promising indications of homeopathy's effectiveness. However, limitations in study design and methodological constraints hinder a definitive assessment of its overall impact. The findings emphasize the need for more rigorous, well-structured research with long-

term follow-ups to establish clearer evidence on the efficacy of homeopathy in managing depression.

(Zepeda-Quiroz *et al.*, 2021) ^[19] This case study presents an intriguing account of a 19-year-old woman with treatment-resistant major depression (TRD), who showed significant improvement following an individualized homeopathic treatment. Despite an extensive history of depression since childhood and resistance to multiple antidepressants and psychotherapy, the patient experienced an immediate and sustained reduction in depressive symptoms after receiving homeopathic remedies, including *Staphisagria*, *Nux vomica*, *Arsenicum album*, and *Lachesis trigonocephalus* in 200CH dynamizations. Over four months, her condition improved to the extent that she was able to discontinue antidepressants and psychotherapy, with a follow-up at eight months confirming her continued well-being without medication. While the report highlights the potential of homeopathy in managing TRD, the lack of controlled studies and objective measures raises concerns regarding scientific validation. The subjective nature of the findings, absence of a placebo-controlled design, and the complex nature of depression warrant further investigation to determine the efficacy of homeopathy as a standalone treatment for TRD. Nonetheless, this case contributes to the ongoing discussion on alternative approaches for managing resistant depression and emphasizes the need for more rigorous clinical trials to substantiate these findings.

(Viksveen *et al.*, 2018) ^[20] This review evaluates the efficacy, effectiveness, and safety of homeopathy in treating depression by analyzing studies published between 1982 and 2016. Among the 18 identified studies, two double-blind placebo-controlled trials assessed homeopathic medicinal products (HMPs), with mixed results—one trial (N = 91) with a high risk of bias found HMPs non-inferior to fluoxetine, while another (N = 133) with a low risk of bias suggested HMPs were comparable to fluoxetine and superior to placebo. Other studies, including an RCT and a cohort study, indicated comparable effectiveness to conventional antidepressants and reduced psychotropic drug use. Patient-reported outcomes showed moderate improvement in most cases, and safety data from 14 trials revealed only mild to moderate transient adverse effects, with no evidence of harm. While the findings suggest a potentially promising risk-benefit ratio for homeopathy in depression, the overall evidence remains limited due to methodological concerns, highlighting the need for further high-quality research.

(Viksveen & Relton, 2017) ^[21] This qualitative study provides valuable insights into the experiences of patients with moderate to severe depression undergoing treatment by homeopaths. Conducted within a randomized controlled trial, the research utilized semi-structured interviews at two time points to assess patients' perceptions and outcomes. Thematic analysis revealed 16 themes categorized into three main areas: a changed understanding of the intervention, experiences with consultations and medication, and variations in health outcomes. Patients reported a sense of personalized care, trust, and optimism from homeopathic consultations, with some experiencing improvements in mood and well-being, while others noted little to no change or transient adverse effects. As the first qualitative study of its kind, these findings highlight the nuanced perspectives of depressed patients toward homeopathic treatment, shedding light on their evolving understanding, therapeutic

experiences, and health progress over time.

(Bagherian, 2015) ^[22] This study explores the impact of homeopathic medicine on anxiety and depression, presenting a well-structured methodology involving 30 randomly selected patients divided into experimental and control groups. Utilizing Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI-Y), the research follows a pretest-posttest and follow-up design, employing repeated measures analysis of covariance. The results indicate a significant reduction ($P < 0.01$) in symptoms post-intervention, with sustained effectiveness in follow-up assessments. These findings support the potential of homeopathic therapy as a viable alternative for managing anxiety and depression, though further large-scale studies are necessary to strengthen the evidence base.

(Oberai *et al.*, 2013) ^[23] The study conducted by the Central Council for Research in Homoeopathy (CCRH) at the Central Research Institute (CRI-H), Kottayam, aimed to evaluate the role of homeopathic medicines in managing depressive episodes through a prospective, non-comparative, open-label observational design from October 2005 to September 2010. A total of 83 patients aged 20-60 years, diagnosed with mood disorders, were enrolled based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, with 67 completing the follow-up. Homeopathic medicines were prescribed in different potencies after repertorisation and final consultation with the *Materia Medica*, while symptom assessment was conducted using internationally recognized scales, including HDRS, BDI, and CGI. Statistical analysis using SPSS version 20 and the ITT principle revealed a significant reduction in mean HDRS scores from 17.98 ± 4.9 at baseline to 5.8 ± 5.9 at the end of the study ($P = 0.0001$, $P < 0.05$), indicating notable improvement. The study also reported significant differences in BDI and CGI scores, with the most frequently prescribed remedies being *Natrum muriaticum*, *Arsenicum album*, *Pulsatilla nigricans*, *Lycopodium clavatum*, and *Phosphorus*. The findings suggest that a six-month course of homeopathic treatment provides significant benefits for depressive episodes, though further controlled studies are necessary to establish its efficacy comprehensively.

(Gromova, 2013) ^[24] The paper presents the main facts from history of homeopathic medicinal approach, its fundamental assumptions and limitations and considers homeopathic substances with the potential to alleviate symptoms of major depression and anxiety comorbidities. Clinical aspects of homeopathic substances, such as their safety and efficacy, will be addressed using the available empirical data, and regulatory standards applicable to marketing and sale of these substances will be briefly addressed as well. The paper will also supply arguments in favor of and against the use of homeopathic substances to treat depression.

(Adler *et al.*, 2011) ^[25] This study explores the effectiveness of individualized homeopathic Q-potencies in treating acute depression, comparing them to placebo and examining the impact of different homeopathic case history approaches. Previous research suggests that homeopathy may not be inferior to fluoxetine for moderate to severe depression, but the specific therapeutic effects of Q-potencies and case history methods remain unclear. Utilizing a randomized, partially double-blind, placebo-controlled, four-armed trial with a 2×2 factorial design, the study will assess 228 patients over six weeks, with the primary endpoint being the 17-item Hamilton Depression Rating Scale score. Secondary

endpoints include additional depression assessments, response and remission rates, quality of life, and safety evaluations. Statistical analyses will be conducted using a two-factorial analysis of covariance and generalized estimation equations. By systematically evaluating both homeopathic remedies and case-taking methods, this study aims to address key challenges in homeopathic research, potentially contributing valuable insights into the ongoing debate on homeopathy's efficacy in depression treatment.

(Pilkington *et al.*, 2006) [7] The systematic review aimed to evaluate the clinical research evidence on homeopathy for anxiety and anxiety disorders through a comprehensive search of major biomedical and complementary medicine databases. Eight randomized controlled studies were identified, covering conditions such as test anxiety, generalized anxiety disorder, and anxiety related to medical or physical conditions. While single case reports, uncontrolled trials, and surveys reported positive outcomes and high patient satisfaction, the randomized trials yielded contradictory results, were underpowered, or lacked methodological clarity. No qualitative research was found, and adverse effects were limited to mild "remedy reactions" like temporary symptom worsening. Due to these limitations, firm conclusions on homeopathy's efficacy for anxiety cannot be drawn, though its frequent use among anxiety sufferers suggests patient interest. If proven effective, homeopathy could offer advantages in terms of safety and acceptability. Thus, further research, particularly pragmatic and qualitative studies, is recommended to better assess its potential benefits.

(Davidson *et al.*, 1997) [11] This study explores the potential of homeopathy as a therapeutic approach for psychiatric conditions, specifically depression and anxiety disorders. Conducted on 12 adult patients with major depression, social phobia, or panic disorder, the study assessed the effects of individualized homeopathic treatments over a period ranging from 7 to 80 weeks. Patients either sought homeopathy voluntarily or were referred after inadequate responses to conventional therapies. Treatment outcomes were measured using a clinical global scale ($n = 12$), the self-rated SCL-90 scale ($n = 8$), and the Brief Social Phobia Scale ($n = 4$). Results indicated a 58% overall improvement based on the clinical global scale and a 50% response rate on the other assessment tools. These findings suggest that homeopathy may have therapeutic potential for affective and anxiety disorders, offering possible benefits for patients across a spectrum of symptom severity. However, further research with larger sample sizes and controlled methodologies is necessary to validate these preliminary observations.

Discussion

This study's results provide more evidence that homeopathy could help with mood and anxiety disorders. According to the literature review, there have been studies that suggest homeopathic remedies such as Aconitum Napellus, Argentum Nitricum, Arsenicum Album, Gelsemium Sempervirens, and Ignatia Amara may have anxiolytic and antidepressant effects. Nevertheless, there is still no clear proof because of methodological flaws, contradictory results, and the absence of large-scale RCTs. Homeopathic treatment may produce effects similar to those of traditional antidepressants, according to some research; however, other studies have found no difference between

homeopathic treatment and placebos. As a result, we must wonder whether homeopathy is effective when used alone and what the underlying mechanisms are. Without a solid scientific explanation for how homeopathy works, it is very difficult to prove that it is effective. Most people do not believe homeopathic remedies work because they are so dilute that they can not even detect a trace of the original ingredient. There has been no evidence to support certain theories, including water memory and quantum entanglement. Also, in cases where psychological factors impact the results of treatment—like anxiety and depression—the placebo effect might be a big reason why people feel better after using homeopathy. Despite these drawbacks, homeopathy is attractive because of the individualized treatment plans it offers, the low risk of adverse effects, and the focus on the patient. Homeopathy has the potential to supplement or even replace conventional psychiatric treatment in areas where it is not widely available. To evaluate homeopathy's efficacy and feasibility for incorporation into holistic mental health approaches, future studies should employ standardized methodologies, strict controls, and comparative analyses with conventional treatments. Well-designed, large-scale clinical trials should be the focus of this research.

Conclusion

The use of homeopathy as a treatment for mental health issues like depression and anxiety is controversial, but it shows promise. There has been some evidence that homeopathic remedies may be just as effective as conventional treatments, but there has not been a large-scale randomized controlled trial, and the exact scientific mechanisms underlying homeopathy are still a mystery. This question of whether or not homeopathy is effective has persisted despite numerous arguments, including those involving the placebo effect, individual differences in treatment response, and research methodological inconsistencies. People looking for holistic, low-risk, and individualized treatment options still often choose homeopathy, despite these challenges. It might be useful as an additional strategy when standard treatments are unavailable or have unsavory side effects. Homeopathic treatment, which is tailored to each patient and takes their unique psychological and physiological needs into account, is complementary to the current trend toward person-centered approaches to mental health. More thorough scientific investigation, such as large-scale clinical trials and systematic reviews, is required before homeopathy can acquire greater acceptance within conventional medicine.

Conflict of Interest

Not available

Financial Support

Not available

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