

# Experiential Avoidance as a Predictor of PTSD Symptom Severity

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## QUESTION

- Does experiential avoidance contribute to PTSD symptom severity above and beyond the effects of maladaptive cognitions?

## BACKGROUND

- Prior research indicates experiential avoidance contributes to the maintenance and severity of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder symptoms (Marx & Sloan, 2005).
- Experiential avoidance is the attempt to avoid aversive private sensations and thoughts by altering the form, frequency, and context with which they appear.
- There is also a robust relationship between maladaptive cognitions and PTSD symptoms, with many PTSD treatments focused on challenging unhelpful trauma-related beliefs (Ehlers & Clark, 2000).

## METHOD

- 174 college students who reported experiencing a DSM-5 Criterion A traumatic event filled out several self-report measures.
- They completed measures of PTSD symptoms (**PTSD Checklist-5**), experiential avoidance (**Acceptance and Action Questionnaire**), and trauma-related beliefs (**Posttraumatic Maladaptive Beliefs Scale**).

## PRIMARY FINDING

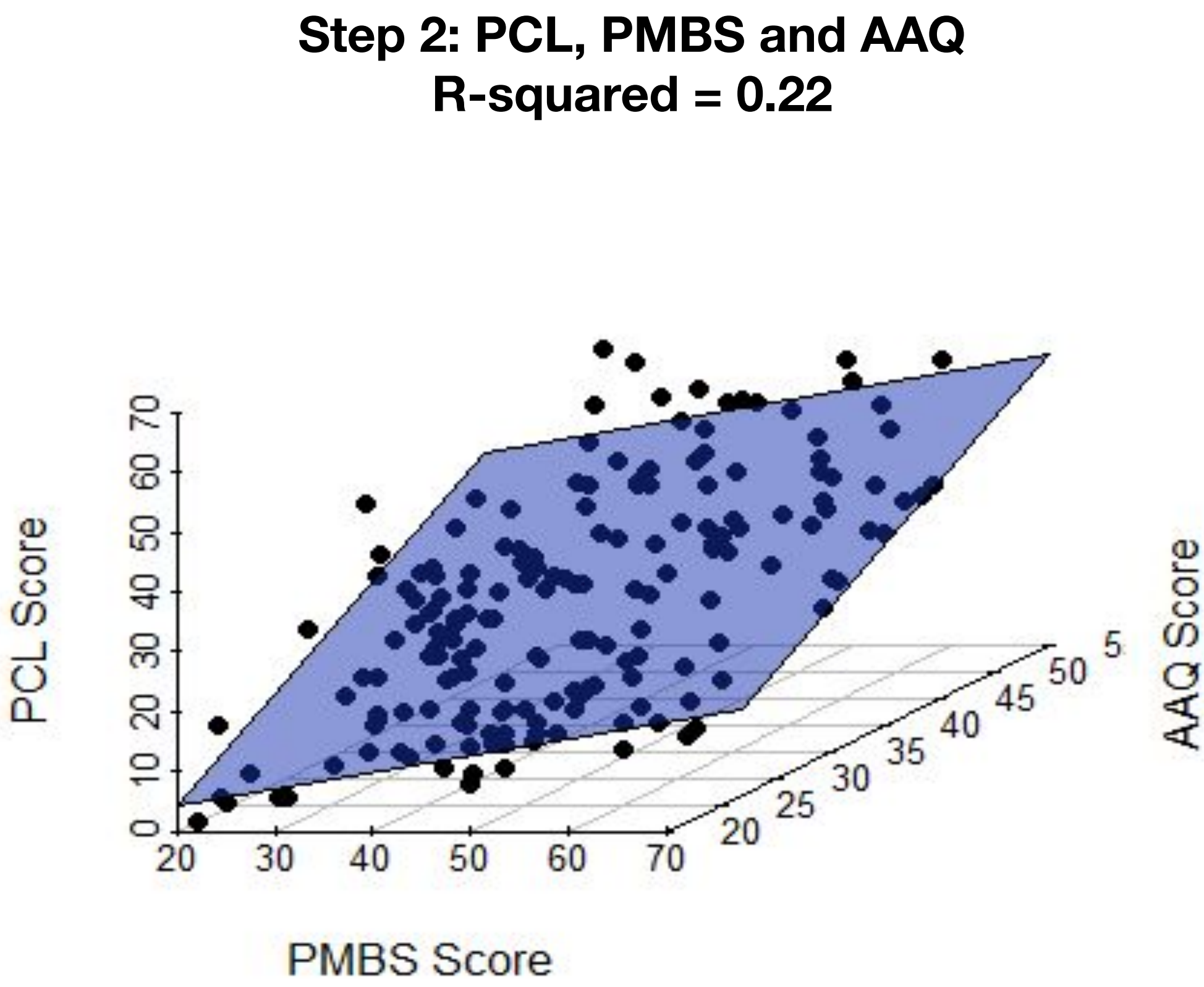
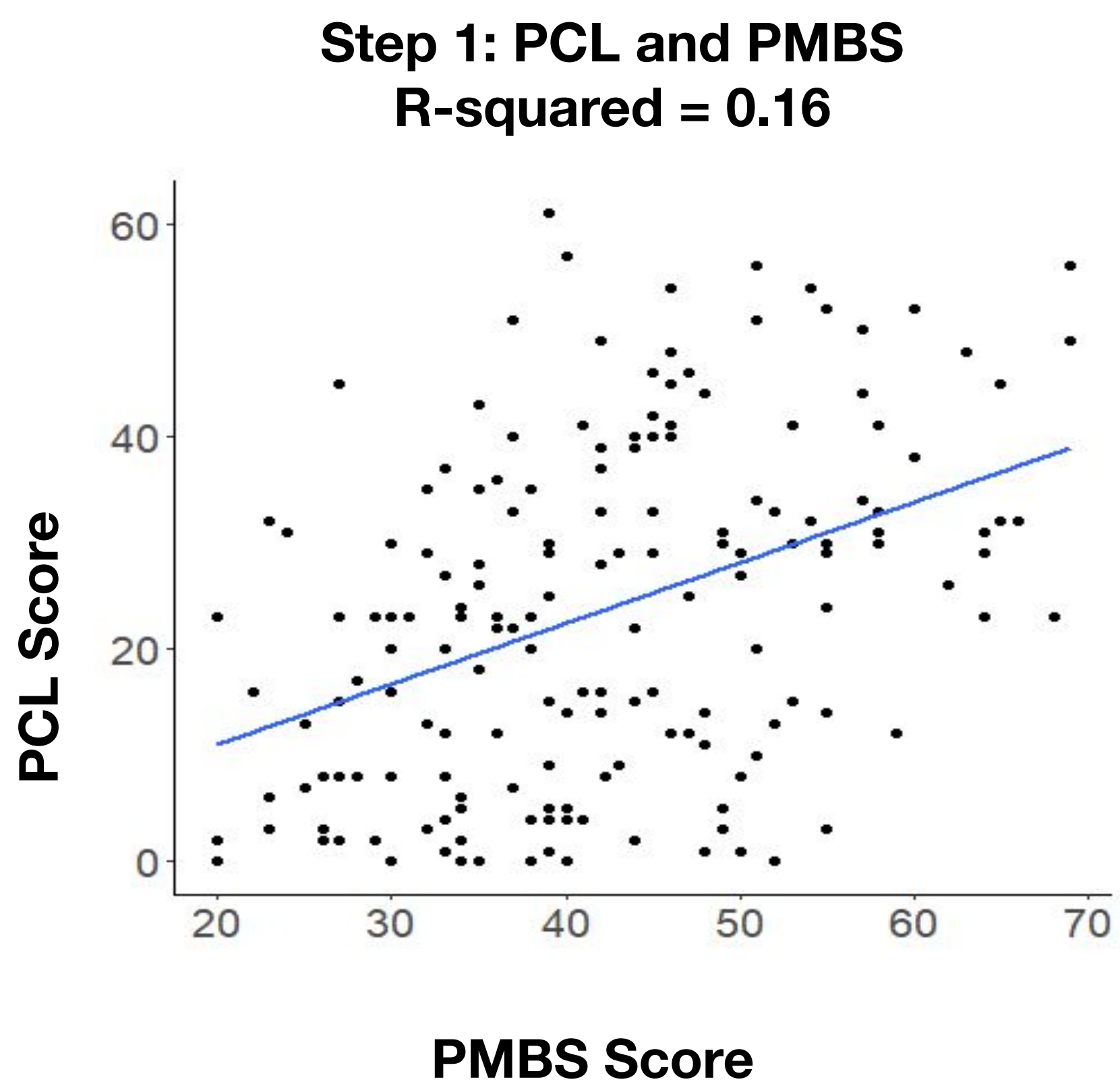
- PTSD treatment should target thought and behavior avoidance in addition to trauma-related beliefs.



- Scan the QR code to get access to the poster, abstract, and bonus details.

## RESULTS

- We conducted a two step hierarchical regression with PTSD symptoms as the dependent variable, maladaptive cognitions (PMBS) as first dependent variable, and experiential avoidance (AAQ) as second dependent variable.
- As demonstrated below, experiential avoidance accounted for an additional 5.1% of the variance when added to the model.**



## RESULTS CONTINUED

- Here is a table summary of the full analysis.

	R <sup>2</sup>	B	SE B	p
Step 1	0.16			
Intercept		-0.28		0.95
PMBS		0.57	0.41	<.001
Step 2	0.22			
Intercept		-16.05	5.94	<.001
PMBS		0.37	0.11	<.001
AAQ		0.66	0.18	<.001

## DISCUSSION

- The cognitive model of PTSD posits negative cognitions are responsible for the psychological distress of PTSD, while the ACT model claims experiential avoidance is the primary driver of PTSD distress (Bond et al., 2011).
- Our research indicates that both cognition and experiential avoidance play a role in predicting PTSD symptom severity.
- Thus, treating both experiential avoidance and maladaptive beliefs may be more effective at alleviating PTSD symptomatology than targeting either alone.

## REFERENCES

Bond, F. W., Hayes, S. C., Baer, R. A., Carpenter, K. M., Guenole, N., Orcutt, H. K., Waltz, T., & Zettle, R. D. (2011). Preliminary psychometric properties of the acceptance and action questionnaire-II: A revised measure of psychological inflexibility and experiential avoidance. *Behavior Therapy, 42*(4), 676-688. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2011.03.007>

Ehlers, A., & Clark, D. M. (2000). A cognitive model of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 38*(4), 319-345. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0009-7967\(99\)00123-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0009-7967(99)00123-0)

Marx, B. P., & Sloan, D. M. (2005). Peritraumatic dissociation and experiential avoidance as predictors of posttraumatic stress symptomatology. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 43*(5), 569-583. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2004.04.004>