

# Achievement Motivation Affects Memory for Unfinished Tasks

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## INTRODUCTION

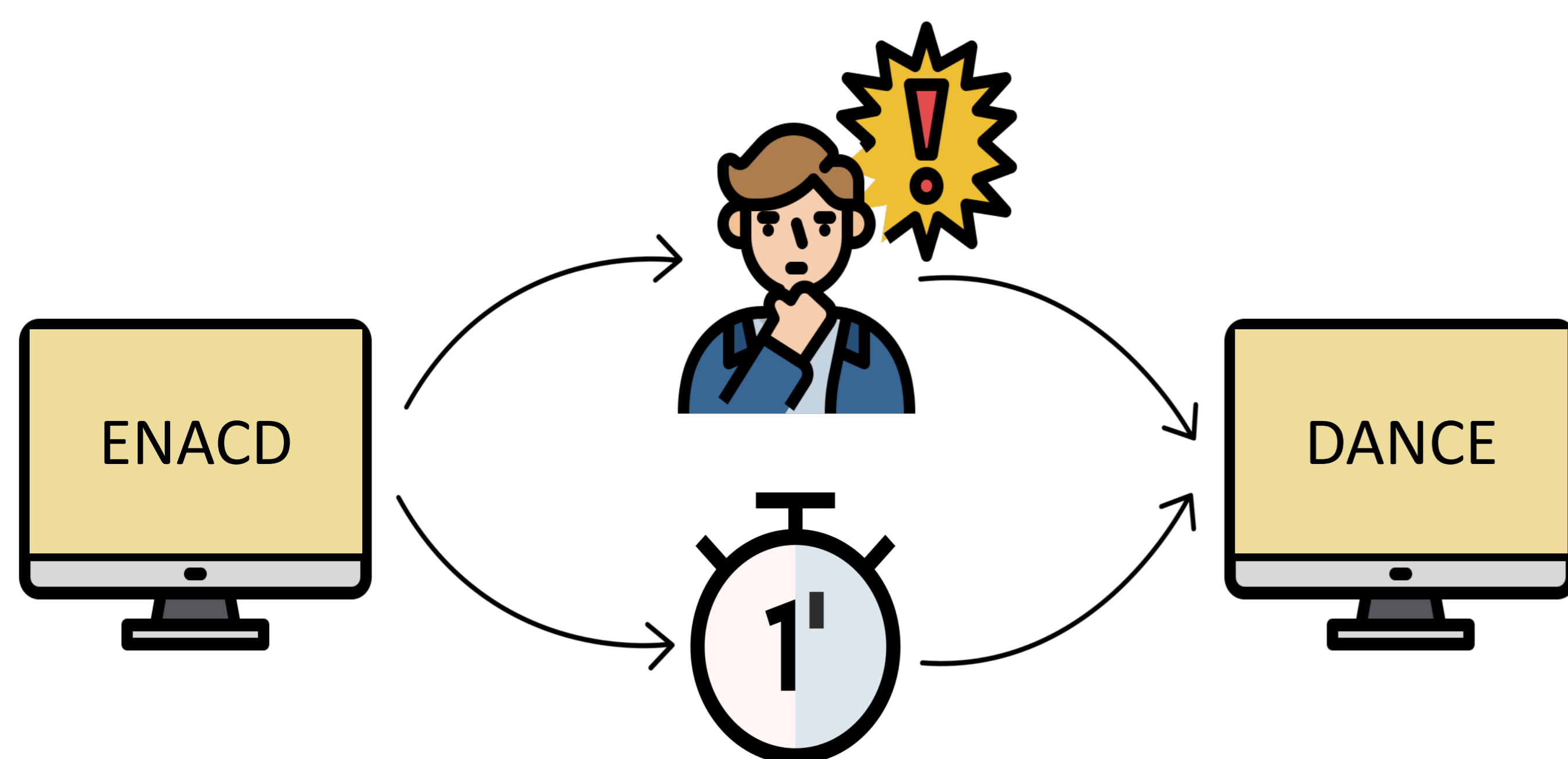
Intentions are an integral part of our everyday life. We intend to send a letter, go grocery shopping after work, or take medicine before going to bed. Forming intentions helps us plan our lives. However, we are often confronted with interruptions while carrying out a task. In these situations, our intentions remain in a **state of activation**. However, the representations of intentions and their recall are likely based on individual differences. For example, **achievement motivation** has been linked with increased recall of unfinished tasks, in particular hope of success, that is, the anticipation of reward (Atkinson, 1953, 1957; Kuhl, 1996).

The goal of the present study was to investigate the memory advantage of unfinished tasks and its relationship with achievement motivation as a personality trait, specifically, hope of success and fear of failure.

## METHOD

Our study included a total of **1076 participants**. Among them, 600 identified as female (56%), 468 identified as male (44%), and eight identified as neither (1%). The age range of participants was between 18 and 45 years, with a mean age of **23.32 years** ( $SD = 4.84$ ).

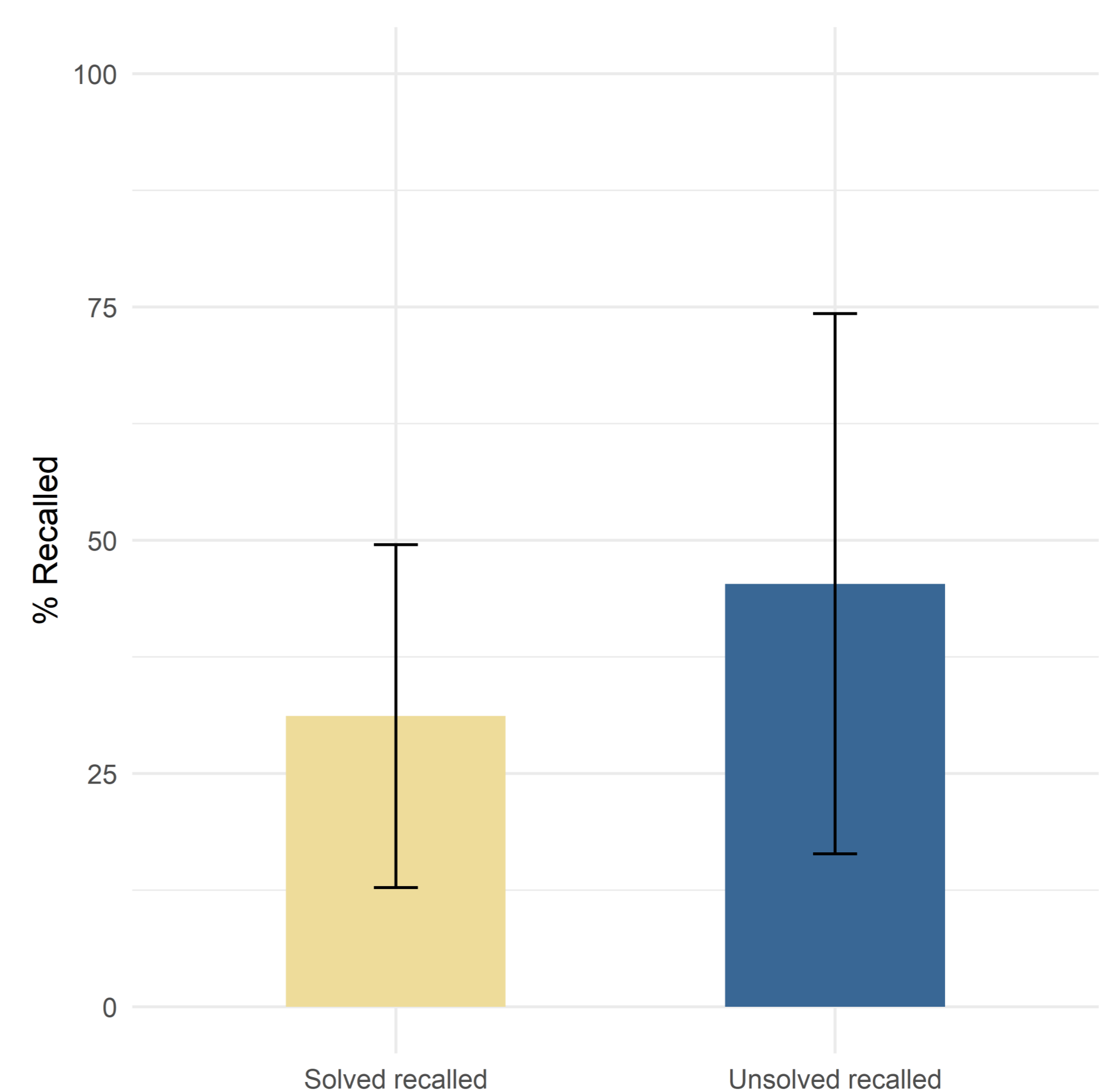
Participants were given **12 anagrams** to solve within **60 seconds** each. If they could not solve them in time, the solution was provided, else we recorded participants' solving time.



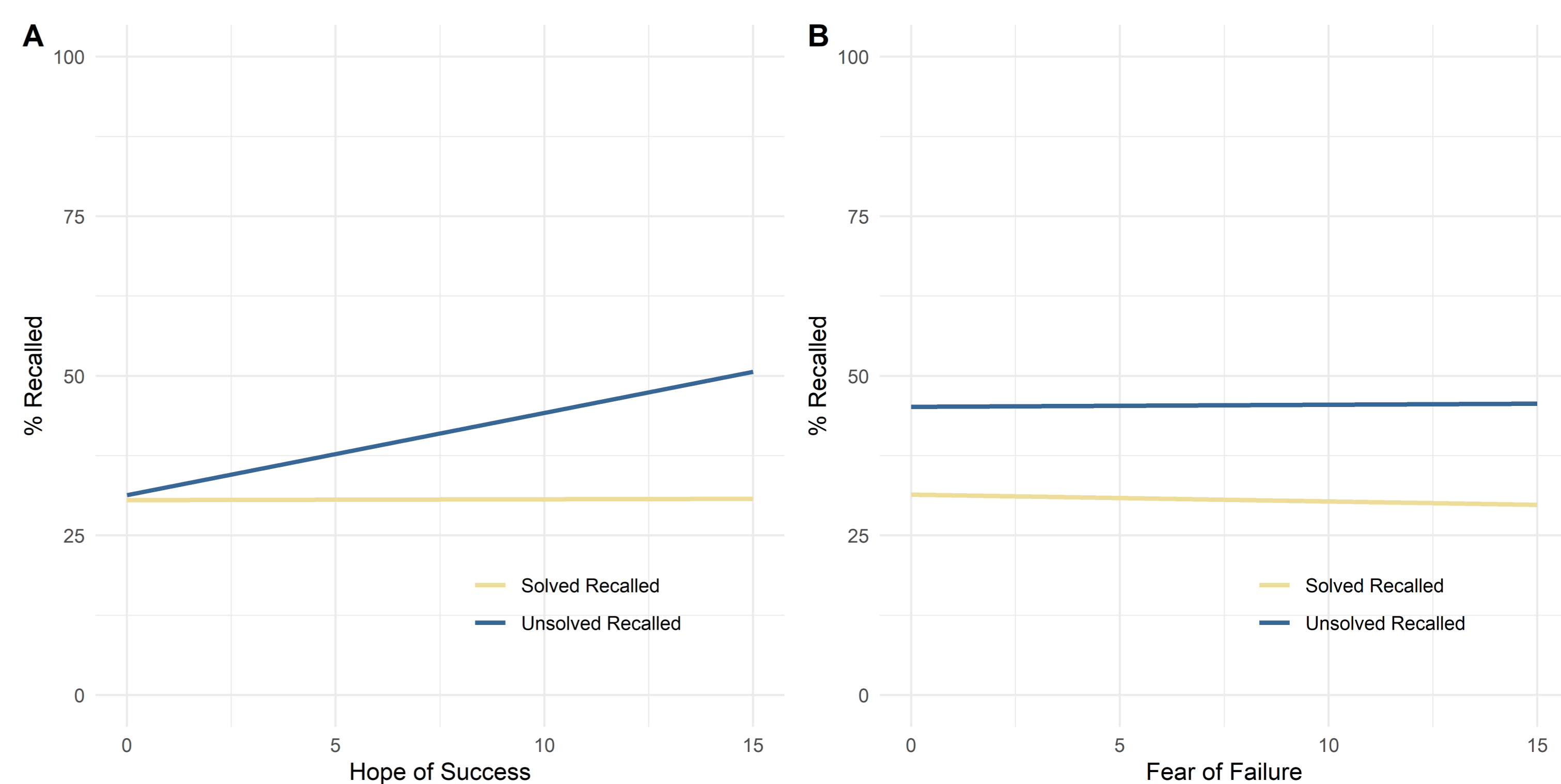
After being presented with the 12 anagrams, participants were asked to **recall the solutions**. Afterwards, participants completed the short version of the **Achievement Motives Scale (AMS-R)** consisting of two scales: The approach tendency, referred to as *hope of success*, and the avoidance tendency, referred to as *fear of failure*.

## RESULTS

**Figure 1**  
*Memory performance, for solved and unsolved anagrams separately.*



**Figure 2**  
*Association of achievement motivation and memory performance: Linear regression lines of (A) hope of success and (B) fear of failure scores predicting the percentage of solved and unsolved recalled anagrams.*



## TAKE HOME MESSAGE

- Unfinished tasks possess a memory advantage compared to finished tasks
- This memory advantage is particularly pronounced among individuals high in achievement motivation, specifically highlighting the role of “hope of success”

## AUTHOR NOTE

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