

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: Uncertainty, Anxiety, and Interpersonal Relationships

Invitation and Brief Summary

You are invited to take part in the research study as described below. The research is being conducted by Dorothy Cassidy, Professor Mark Freeston, and Dr Gavin Clark within the School of Psychology, Newcastle University. The information provided below explains the purpose of the research and what participation in this study will involve. Before continuing, please take time to read the information carefully. If you have any questions about the study after reading this information, please contact a member of the research team using the contact details provided.

What will the study involve?

Should you agree to participate, you will continue to an online questionnaire. Once you click to the next page, you will see an Informed Consent Form that you will be required to fill in. Once you have consented to participation in the study, you will be asked to provide information about yourself including age, gender, nationality, and relationship status. This is followed by a series of questionnaires. If you accept to participate, you are not obliged to answer specific questions if you prefer not to. The questionnaires involve questions about different types of everyday checking behaviours and reassurance seeking, common anxieties and worry, and your attitudes and expectations in romantic relationships. The survey should take approximately 30 minutes to complete all together.

Will I be able to leave the survey and return to it later?

If you find it difficult to complete the survey in one go, you may stop and return to it later provided you **use the same browser each time**.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to investigate uncertainty in everyday life, anxiety, and interpersonal relationships. Different people react differently to the uncertainties they experience in their lives; some find it more difficult to manage these everyday uncertainties than others. This may contribute to anxiety and worries about what may happen.

Relationships with other people can sometimes be a source of concern, but they can also help people manage their uncertainties and worries. People differ in the extent to which they rely on the different people around them to help them cope with uncertainty and anxiety. This study seeks to further understand how these different experiences and behaviours are related.

Please note that you do not need to experience difficulties with worry or symptoms of anxiety, or have experienced any related mental health difficulties, in order to participate in this study. The survey asks questions about anxiety experiences, and specific behaviours which people may employ in their relationships and in uncertain situations, all of which are present throughout the population.

Am I eligible for participation?

To be eligible, you must be over the age of 18 and be comfortable with written English.

What are the benefits of this research?

There are no direct benefits from participation in this study. However, your participation would help to increase knowledge in this area and could inform future research into possible causes and contributing factors to how people experience anxiety, checking and reassurance seeking which, in turn, will allow us to see how best to support people who experience high levels of distress.

What are the risks of taking part in the study?

The researchers do not anticipate any negative effects or risks of taking part in this study. The survey includes questions which ask about your experience of compulsive checking behaviour, and anxieties around uncertainty and a need for reassurance. These questions do not require any elaboration on specific events. If you feel as though this may cause you distress, it is advised that you do not take part. If for any reason you feel distressed by your experiences or are concerned regarding any of the issues raised whilst completing this survey, it may be helpful to contact your local GP and discuss your concerns with them.

If you do not feel that you can keep you or someone else safe, call 999 or go to A&E now.

If you require urgent mental health support or advice, the following webpage will help you find an NHS urgent helpline: <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/get-urgent-help-for-mental-health/>

The Samaritans hotline offers a safe place for you to talk about anything that is bothering you. You can contact Samaritans on 116 123 at any time or visit the website for more details: <https://www.samaritans.org/>

Shout is a free and confidential, 24/7 text messaging support service for anyone who is struggling to cope. Text 85258 to access support or visit the website for more details: <https://giveusashout.org>

If you would like more information about obsessive-compulsive disorder, including how to get help, then you may find this webpage helpful: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/overview/>

If you are living with OCD, the following organisations may be useful sources of support:

OCD UK: <https://www.ocduk.org>

OCD Action: <https://ocdaction.org.uk>

If you would like more information about anxiety, fear or panic, including how to get help, you may find this webpage helpful: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/anxiety-fear-panic/>

Anxiety UK is a charity that offers advice and information about anxiety and coping with anxiety: <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk>

If you think you are struggling to cope with anxiety and/or obsessions and compulsions, and you live in England, you can self-refer to an NHS psychological therapies service. This website will help you find your local service: <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-a-psychological-therapies-service/>

How will my confidentiality be protected?

We will protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the best of our ability. No personal identifying information will be gathered from you in the course of the survey or in order for you to consent to participate in the research. For instance, you will not be asked to provide your name, date of birth or location of residence. All data collected will be electronic. This data will be kept private, in a password protected folder that is only accessible to the researcher and research supervisor. The completely anonymised numerical data will be stored on a password protected file and may be used for future research. If suitable, the data reported at a group level only may also be published in a research report.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are entitled to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. There are no consequences as a result of your withdrawal. You are free to withdraw at any time during the study and up to two weeks after taking part, without giving a reason.

As you go through the online questionnaires, your responses will be saved. You do not have to respond to all questions, and there is no time limit in place. If you decide to stop in the middle of the study, your responses up until that time may still be used. If this happens and you do not want any of your responses to be used or if you later decide you want to withdraw, please contact us via email. You can find contact details at the bottom of this page.

At the start of the survey, you will be asked to choose a four-digit participant code number. This will be used to identify your responses if you wish to withdraw your data if you decide that you do not want any of the responses you give in the survey to be analysed as part of the research project. It is therefore important that you use a memorable number and/or keep a note of it. The approximate time you started the survey and your age could be used as an alternative method for this.

If you decide that you wish to withdraw your data, please contact a member of the research team, whose email addresses can be found below. You will need to remember the 4-digit code you created at the start of the survey. You will not be asked for a reason for withdrawal of information.

How do I agree to participate?

If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understand this statement by indicating your consent on the form provided.

What will happen to the information that I provide?

The information collected from the online survey will be used in the completion of Dorothy Cassidy's research thesis being conducted as part of the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology.

All participant data will be used wherever possible. The results from the survey will be submitted in the form of a written report. If suitable, the results may be published in an academic journal and/or presented at a research conference. At all times, your identity will be kept anonymous.

How will my data be disposed of?

Once we have finished the study, the anonymised numerical data will be stored according to Newcastle University's research data policies in a password protected file and may be used for future research. If suitable, the data may also be published in a research report and stored in an online data repository.

Has this study received ethical approval?

This study was approved by the Faculty of Medical Sciences Research Ethics Committee, part of Newcastle University's Research Ethics Committee. This committee includes members who are internal to the Faculty. This study was reviewed by members of the Committee, who must provide impartial advice and avoid significant conflicts of interest.

Who should I contact for further information relating to the research?

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the research team using the following details below:

Dorothy Cassidy – d.cassidy2@newcastle.ac.uk

Professor Mark Freeston- mark.freeston@newcastle.ac.uk

Dr Gavin Clark – gavin.clark@newcastle.ac.uk

School of Psychology, Margaret Barbour Building, Wallace Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4DR

If you have any complaints regarding the manner in which this research is conducted, please contact the Chair of the Faculty Ethics Committee at fms.ethics@ncl.ac.uk.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research study.

Regards,

Dorothy Cassidy