

Focus Group Plain Language Statement

Title: Investigating the Impact of Social Engagement on the Well-being and Quality of Life of Older Adults in Ireland

Introduction to the research study

You are invited to participate in the research project titled “Investigating the Impact of Social Engagement on the Well-being and Quality of Life of Older Adults in Ireland”. This research project has been conducted by Marta Cesarini (student researcher) and Dr Louise Hopper (principal investigator) of the School of Psychology, Dublin City University. This project is part of a postgraduate thesis.

Brief description of the research

We are social beings, as our lives are embedded in social relationships. Our social connections involve family, friends, and other community members. The purposeful act of spending pleasurable time with other people is called social engagement. Research suggests that building and maintaining healthy social connections is good for our well-being and quality of life at all ages. For instance, social engagement in older age has been associated with living longer and reduced risk of illness. However, we need to know more about why this is the case. This research aims to understand how social engagement impacts the well-being and quality of life of people aged 65 and older and to identify which aspects of social engagement determine these positive effects.

Why is this research being carried out?

This study is being carried out as part of a Master's in Psychology and Well-being. The research also has practical applications. A potential application of the study is to inform future research and policy to develop targeted activities and interventions to improve older people's well-being and Quality of Life. This, in turn, should also improve their overall health status, relieving pressure on health systems that will face an increasingly ageing population in the coming years.

Am I eligible to take part in this study?

People who are 65 years old or older and live independently or with other family members are eligible to participate. People who took part in the survey directly related with this study are not eligible to take part in the focus group. Should you have any doubt regarding your eligibility please contact the researchers through the contact details provided below.

What will I be required to do if I participate?

Upon consent, you will be required to participate in a focus group with other 5-7 people. The focus group will take place in a private room at Dublin City University at a date and time to be established together with the other participants. If the focus group does not suit the participants, the researchers could offer a face-to-face or online interview. The focus group or the interview will follow a semi-structured agenda and will be audiotaped. The participants will be asked to discuss their current social engagement activities and their thoughts on the impact of social engagement on their quality of life and well-being. Finally, the researcher will offer a debriefing session where participants can share feedback and ask questions on the focus group. The focus group will take one hour.

Are there any benefits to participation?

Participants may enjoy partaking in the study process itself. Participants will have the opportunity to learn about the impact of social engagement on the well-being and quality of life of older people. Participants might find meaningful research contributions that aim to improve the lives of older people. Additionally, participation may inform policy and future interventions that can contribute to supporting health agencies.

Are there any risks involved?

Although the researchers have recognised minimal risk in this study, participants may not want to participate. Participants will be invited to reflect on their level of social

engagement and health status. The questions have been screened and we do not expect them to evoke distress. However, if you anticipate this will cause discomfort or anxiety, you are encouraged not to participate. After the study, you will be fully debriefed and provided with relevant contact information. You also have the ability to withdraw from the study at any stage during the focus group.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any stage during the focus group up to the end of the session. Should you decide to withdraw your data, there will be no penalty. You can withdraw your data from the study up to possible publication through. Suppose you will disclose your participation in the study with the researcher. In that case, you automatically grant consent to be identified as a participant. However, the researchers might not be able to identify your data. In the latter case, your information will be kept confidential and accessed only by the researchers. Your information and data will be deleted once the query is resolved.

How will my information be protected?

Only the researcher, the research supervisor, the examiner(s) and the Qualtrics administrator will have access to the data, which will be deleted five years after study completion. No identifiable information will be collected, and measures have been implemented to protect your anonymity. Please note that confidentiality can only be provided within the limits of the law. However, given the nature of this study, legal issues are not expected to arise. This study complies with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). If you have any concerns about your data, you should contact Dr Hopper or the Dublin City University data protection officer Mr. Martin Ward; Ph. 7005118 / 7008257; E-mail: data.protection@dcu.ie.

Can I find out about the study results?

Requests about the study results can be made to the e-mail address in this plain language statement. However, there will be no opportunity for formal feedback or interpretation of an individual's results. Social engagement, quality of life and well-

being measures are being used solely for research purposes, and the student researcher cannot provide a profile from such measures. A summary of the study's findings can be requested by contacting the researcher. If you have any additional questions, please get in touch with the researchers via the e-mail addresses provided.

Ethical approval for this study has been obtained from the Psychology Ethics Committee (PEC) under the delegated authority of the DCU Research Ethics Committee (Approval code: DCUPEC_2024_143). If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact the researchers.

If you wish to participate in this study or require further information, please inform the researchers in person or via the e-mail address provided.

- **Principal Investigator: Dr Louise Hopper; Ph: 01 7008540, E-mail: louise.hopper@dcu.ie**
- **Student Researcher: Ms Marta Cesarini; Ph. 087 4689705, E-mail: marta.cesarini2@mail.dcu.ie**

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact the Psychology Ethics Committee: pec@dcu.ie