

Plain Language Statement

“Cultivating joy: Exploring the relationship between hobbies, mindfulness, happiness and life satisfaction in neurotypical and autistic populations.”

Student researcher – Sarah Hickey

Research supervisor – Dr Sinead Smyth

You are being invited to participate in this research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following document carefully as it is designed to answer many of these questions. You are free to ask any of the researchers if any of the details provided are not clear.

Why is this research being carried out?

This research study is being conducted as a postgraduate research project, which has been approved by the Psychology Ethics Committee in Dublin City University. The results of the study will be presented to the DCU School of Psychology. If you have concerns about the manner in which this study was conducted or if you have any concerns about any aspect of it at a later stage, please do not hesitate to contact the student researcher at sarah.hickey34@mail.dcu.ie, or the research supervisor Dr Sinead Smyth from the Dublin City University School of Psychology on (01) 700 7422 or by email at sinead.smyth@dcu.ie. Alternatively, you can contact the DCU Psychology Ethics Committee who are independent from the researchers: pec@dcu.ie.

Brief description of the research.

The current study aims to investigate the relationship between hobbies/interests, mindfulness and happiness/life satisfaction in both non-autistic people and people with autism. We are looking for insights into what kind of hobbies/interests people engage in and self-reported levels of happiness and life satisfaction. The existing data shows that engaging in hobbies/interests is closely linked to a person's positive wellbeing. However, this study will be one of the first to look at both non-autistic people and people with autism together. The results of each group of people will be compared to find any differences or similarities.

Am I eligible to take part in this study?

To take part in the study, you are required to be:

1. Over the age of 18

2. Have a hobby or interest that you currently engage in for at least 2 hours per week
3. Either have an official diagnosis of autism or are non-autistic (this is self-reported in the survey)

What will I be required to do if I participate?

If you do decide to participate in this study, you will be invited to complete a short survey online. This should take no longer than 15 minutes. During this survey, you will be asked some questions about yourself and your hobby or interest. You will also be asked some questions about your current wellbeing.

Are there any benefits to participation?

There are no direct benefits to participants; however, some individuals may feel a sense of satisfaction through participating in helping to understand the relationship between hobbies/interests and happiness/life satisfaction across neurotypical and neurodiverse populations. Participants may also gain knowledge of the positive influence that hobbies and/or interests have on personal wellbeing. There may also be indirect benefits to society associated with this research if the dissemination of results allows service providers to better understand the relationship between hobbies/interests in people with autism and their personal happiness/life satisfaction.

Are there any risks involved?

It is not anticipated that there is any risk in participating in the current study. However, if you wish to discuss any unpleasant or distressful thoughts or emotions that you experienced during the study or after you completed the study, you will be directed to link in with your support network and your GP. A list of provisional helpline contacts will also be given at the end of the survey.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation is entirely voluntary. If any aspect of the study makes you feel uncomfortable or distressed at any stage, you may withdraw from the study without prejudice. Withdrawal counts as not completing the survey, without giving any reasons for your withdrawal. Withdrawal will not result in penalization of any kind.

How will my data be protected?

A signature will not be required to give consent to participate in this study; you will only be asked to tick a number of boxes. For the duration of data collection, all data will be stored securely in the DCU drive. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have direct access to the data, but access will be granted to examiners if deemed necessary. Upon completion of the research project, all data will be transferred to the supervisor who will archive it indefinitely on a secure drive on a password-protected laptop.

Your data will be completely anonymous from the moment of collection. Data collected from this survey will be shared with open science websites that other researchers can see. This is being done to contribute to transparency within scientific research. If you are not comfortable with this, then you are free to not participate in the survey.

However, there are legal limitations to data confidentiality. We are required to make a mandated report if there is suspicion of endangerment or abuse of any kind.

How will my data be used?

Your data will be used for the purpose of a postgraduate research project. It may also be sent to a peer-reviewed journal for the purposes of publication or be presented in a conference. Your data will also be shared with open science websites that other researchers can see. This is being done to contribute to transparency within scientific research. All of your data will be completely anonymous.

If you are not comfortable with this, then you are free to not participate in the survey.

Can I find out about the study results?

Requests can be made about the results of the study to the email addresses given on this plain language statement. However, there will be no opportunity for formal feedback or interpretation of an individual's results. A summary of the study's findings can be requested by contacting the researcher, from the end of August 2024 to the end of November 2024. If you have any additional questions, please contact the researchers via the email addresses provided.

Researcher contacts:

Sarah Hickey (Student Researcher): sarah.hickey34@mail.dcu.ie

Dr Sinead Smyth (Supervisor): sinead.smyth@dcu.ie

DCU Ethics Committee:

DCU Psychology Ethics Committee: pec@dcu.ie

Helpline contacts:

Turn2Me: turn2me.ie

Samaritans: call 116 123

Text About It: text HELLO to 50808

SOSAD Ireland: sosadireland.ie / 1800 901 909