January 2021

Title of the Study: Cross-Canada Evaluation of the Post-Secondary Student Stressors Index (PSSI)

Dear Student,

You are invited to participate in a research study to evaluate The Post-Secondary Student Stressors Index (PSSI), a new instrument designed to better assess the sources of post-secondary student stress.

Purpose of the Study: The PSSI was designed to help post-secondary institutions to better evaluate the sources of post-secondary student stress, and therefore improve the targeting of mental health services on campus. The ultimate goal is to improve mental health outcomes for students across Canada.

To ensure that this tool serves students in the best possible way, students were involved at all levels of the development process. Students - like you - took part in developing the initial pool of stressors, and then refining that item pool. Students were asked to help me determine which stressors should be mediated to make the greatest positive impact on student mental health and emotional wellbeing. After months of development and refinement, the instrument was pilot tested at an Ontario university, demonstrating excellent validity and reliability.

But the work isn't done. In order to make sure this tool works for everyone, my goal is to conduct a cross-national multi-site test of the PSSI, engaging students at different universities across Canada. That's where you come in.

Participation:
If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete online surveys in January and March. The survey should take you no more than 20 minutes, and includes: The Post-Secondary Student Stressors Index, three 10-item scales evaluating stress, distress, and resilience, some questions about your experiences with stress associated with COVID-19, and some demographic questions. The reason you are being invited to complete the same survey at different timepoints is so that we can observe whether there are changes in the patterns of stress experienced by students over the course of an academic year. The survey dates have been selected carefully so that they do not interfere with particularly busy parts of the year (i.e., final exams).

Risks and benefits of participating: There are no direct benefits to participants for taking part in this research. There is a chance you may experience an elevated level of stress after answering several questions about stress and mental health. In this case, participants are encouraged to reach out to their Campus Wellness Services, the information for which is provided at the end of the survey.

Confidentiality and anonymity: All survey responses are anonymous, using a unique identifier that you will create at the beginning of the survey. The only individuals with access to the data will be the principal investigators named above. If you choose to enter your e-mail into the draw for a chance to win

a gift card (see 'Compensation for participating' below), know that your e-mail will be stored separately from all other survey responses and will be kept in the strictest confidence. You will only be contacted in the event that you are a draw winner. Only the project PI (BL) will have access to your e-mail.

Data storage: Anonymous data files will be stored as password protected electronic files, and will only be accessed by the principal investigators. Data will be stored for a minimum of five years, at which point, it will be destroyed. E-mails entered into the raffle (see next point) will be destroyed immediately after winners are drawn and contacted.

Compensation for participating: Everyone who completes the surveys will be invited to enter their e-mail into a draw for a chance to win one of several $25-$50 gift cards. The chances of winning are relative to the number of participants who choose to enter. Each survey completed is one opportunity to enter your e-mail into the draw. For example, if you complete only one of the three surveys, you can enter once. If you complete all three surveys, you can enter three times.

Voluntary participation: Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary and will have no impact on your academic standing. Surveys will remain open for participation for 2 weeks following the invitation to participate, at which point, they will be closed. If at any point you decide to withdraw your participation while completing the survey, you may do so by simply closing your browser window. Note that data entered up until the point of abandonment will be analyzed, unless the participant contacts the Principal Investigator (Brooke Linden) to request this data be formally removed. If you wish to withdraw your data from the study after submitting a survey, you may contact the principal investigator up until the end of April 2021. You will be asked to provide answers for the three questions used to develop your unique identifier. Your data files will then be located and permanently deleted.

Information about study results: Results of the study will not be communicated directly to participants, but results will be published in an open-access, academic journal for public consumption. Results from this research may also be presented at academic conferences (i.e., oral or poster presentations).

Ethics:
This study has been reviewed for ethical compliance by the Queen's University Health Sciences and Affiliated Teaching Hospitals Research Ethics Board (HSREB) and the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board. The REBs reserve the right to review research data files for auditing or quality control purposes.

Contact Information: If at any time you have further questions about this study, feel free to contact the principal investigator for the study, Dr. Brooke Linden (bjd@queensu.ca) or on-site co-investigator, Dr. Alyson Mahar (Alyson_Mahar@cpe.umanitoba.ca). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Manitoba REB (bannreb@umanitoba.ca).

Thank you for your participation in this research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Brooke Linden, PhD
Principal Investigator (Project)

Dr. Alyson Mahar, PhD
Co-Investigator (On-site)