

## Participant Information Sheet

### *COVID-19: Technology, Use, Behaviour, Social Connections, Self-isolation & Loneliness Study*

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, 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 information carefully.

This participant information sheet is for participants taking part in the Focus Group

#### **Who are we?**

This research is being conducted by researchers Dr Hannah R. Marston and Dr Sarah Earle from The Open University. This research study is funded by the Health and Wellbeing Priority Research Area at The Open University

If you have any queries about the research, please contact Hannah Marston by email at [Hannah.Marston@open.ac.uk](mailto:Hannah.Marston@open.ac.uk) or telephone her on: 01908568541.

Co-I: Dr Sarah Earle: [sarah.earle@open.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.earle@open.ac.uk)

If you would like to talk with an alternative, independent person who is not part of the research team about this research, please contact Regine Hampel (Associate Dean for Research, Faculty of WELs): [regine.hampel@open.ac.uk](mailto:regine.hampel@open.ac.uk)/01908 858704.

#### **Information about the research study and data**

The aims of the project are to:

- Explore technology use, behaviour by citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Explore how citizens use technology to connect with COVID-19 support groups
- Explore how citizens use technology to share information during COVID-19 pandemic
- Explore the health and wellbeing of citizens during COVID-19 relating to loneliness, and digital health literacy
- Explore how sharing information, may differ across different citizens
- Explore the thoughts of citizens relating to a National Emergency Alert system
- Explore the behaviour and narratives of users who are using technology to maintain social connections, build new connections during COVID-19 pandemic

**Duration of time** to complete survey: approximately 20-30 minutes

## **Duration of data collection**

- The research has been approved by the Open University's Human Research Ethics Committee (**HREC/3551/MARSTON**).
- Survey data collection will be open for a period of **3 months**.

To preserve your anonymity and also link all the information you provide together, we will provide you with a 'participant code' (e.g. P1, P2, P3) that should be entered on all the information you provide. At no point will this code be linked to your name or other identifying information.

## **What will I be asked to do if I agree to take part?**

- It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part.
- If you do decide to take part, you can download this information sheet from the study website: <Study Weblink> to keep and if you choose to complete the ONLINE survey you will be asked to sign a consent form prior to starting the survey.
- If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time, and without giving a reason, up to 28-days after the research is completed (as per the guidance offered by the British Sociological Association (BSA) regarding research ethics).

We are hoping that the research project will help us to better understand the use of technology in the context of the WI, associated to social isolation, loneliness and social engagements/interaction.

## **How will the data I provide be used?**

We will not collect any information that will allow you to be linked to your data. All information will be digitised and stored on secure servers at The Open University or the Qualtrics online survey platform (which uses servers physically located in the EU) for the duration of the study and for the period specified by the journals in which the results are published. This is likely to be for at least 5 years from the start of ethical approval. .

The data you provide will be analysed and used in articles for academic and/or practitioner focused journals, reports to charities and stakeholders, conference presentations and reports published online. It will be presented in summary form and any quotes used from the information you provide will be anonymised.

The anonymised data from the project may be archived in research data repositories. Data stored in repositories will be for 10 years

## **Social Media and Website Presence:**

Study updates, quotes from focus groups and statistical information will be shared across different social media platforms (i.e. Twitter, Instagram, Facebook). Members of the study team and the H&W PRA already have existing social media presence and the COVID19\_Tech study will also have a presence.

1. Twitter accounts:
  - a. @HannahRMarston
  - b. @healthwellbein4
  - c. @saraearle
2. Facebook & Instagram accounts for:
  - a. Hannah Marston
  - b. Health & Wellbeing PRA Facebook Page

A specific study website will also be created via the Health and Wellbeing Strategic Research Area (HW&SRA) website (<https://healthwellbeing.kmi.open.ac.uk/>), which will detail the study aims and objectives, team members, study updates and dissemination activities.

## Your right to withdraw from the study

- You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time during your participation by contacting Hannah Marston (contact details at top of document) and asking to withdraw. If you do decide to withdraw, we will remove or destroy any information we have collected from you.
- Because this survey is online, and all personal information and identification data is not recorded, it will be difficult to remove.

## Data Protection

The Open University is the Data Controller for the personal data that you provide. The lawful reason for processing your data will be that conducting academic research is part of the Open University's public task. The consent we request from you relates to ethical considerations.

Please note that no personal data will be collected from you as part of this research. If you are concerned about the way we have processed your personal information, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Please visit the ICO's website for further details.

## What if I have any questions?

If you have any questions or would like any further information about the research, please contact Drs Hannah Marston, or Sarah Earle (contact details at top of document).

## How do I agree to take part?

To participate in the research, please complete and sign the attached consent form at the time of the focus group to the designated researcher(s) (Drs Lee, Earle or Marston),

## Complaint about the research

If you have any issues surrounding the research and you wish to complain or raise your concerns please contact the Associate Dean for Research in the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELs):

- Professor Regine Hampel
- [Regine.hampel@open.ac.uk](mailto:Regine.hampel@open.ac.uk)
- 01980 858704

## Risk of Harm

- Participants may feel exploited, vulnerable given the nature of the topic of this study and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, information/weblinks will be made available relating to how one should keep safe online via national helplines and the UK Government website
  - <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
  - <https://www.samaritans.org/>

Older adults who are recruited, we will provide them with weblinks relating to staying safe online (<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/technology-internet/internet-security/>)

## Reimbursement

There is no reimbursement for completing this online survey.

## Thank you

During this time of crisis, we would understand many people are dealing with various concerns and issues. We really do appreciate your time in taking to complete this online survey and contributing to valuable research during the COVID-19 pandemic.