

**Letter of Information and Invitation to Participate in a Research Study:**  
Cross-Canada Release of the Post-Secondary Student Stressors Index (PSSI)



January 2021

Dear Student,

**Purpose of the Study:**

You are invited to participate in a research study to evaluate The Post-Secondary Student Stressors Index (PSSI) led by Dr. Brooke Linden (Principal Investigator) from the Health Services and Policy Research Institute at Queen's University. The PSSI is a new instrument designed to better assess the sources of post-secondary student stress. My intent is for this tool to be used to help post-secondary institutions across Canada better target their student mental health services, with the ultimate goal of improving mental health outcomes for students.

To ensure that this tool serves students in the best possible way, I involved students 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.

**What You Will be Asked to Do:**

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. There is no exclusion criteria for this study – all students are welcome to participate.

**Why do I have to complete different surveys?**

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).

**What do I get 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. You must complete the survey to be able to enter the draw.

**Risks and Benefits of Participating**

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. While there are no direct benefits to participants, the data derived from this research may inform future work regarding student stress and

assist post-secondary institutions with improving the targeting of upstream mental health services. The potential subsequent adoption of the PSSI as a regular screening tool for institutions may result in improved targeting of upstream mental health services, and thereby improved overall mental and emotional health outcomes for students across Canada.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:**

All responses to this survey are anonymous, using a unique identifier that you will create at the beginning of the survey. Confidentiality of responses will be protected to the extent permitted by the applicable laws. Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary and will have no impact on your academic standing. If at any point you decide to withdraw your participation while completing the survey, you may do so by simply closing your browser window. If you wish to withdraw your data from the study after submitting a survey, you may contact the principal investigator. 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.

**Data Storage and Usage:**

Anonymous data will be kept as password protected files and will be stored on Queen's University's secure Microsoft platform (i.e., One Drive), accessible only by Dr. Brooke Linden. Data will be retained for a minimum of 5 years and may be used in subsequent secondary analysis studies. The intention is for the results of this study to be published in academic journal articles and/or presented at relevant academic conferences. Participants will not be identified during publication/presentation.

**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 UPEI Research Ethics Board. The REBs reserve the right to access study-related records to monitor the ethical conduct of the research and for 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 ([brooke.linden@queensu.ca](mailto:brooke.linden@queensu.ca)) or UPEI co-investigator, Dr. Jason Doiron ([jpdoiron@upei.ca](mailto:jpdoiron@upei.ca)). If you have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board at 902-620-5104, or by email at [reb@upei.ca](mailto:reb@upei.ca). It is recommended that you keep a copy of this LOI for your records.

Thank you for your participation in this research.

Sincerely,



Dr. Brooke Linden, PhD



Dr. Jason Doiron, PhD