



## Participant Information Sheet

*This study has been approved by UCL Research Department's Ethics Chair [Project ID: CEHP/2021/587]*

### **Title of Study: Enhancing a virtual reality intervention for self-criticism to target fears, blocks, and resistances to compassion in the helping professions**

*Department: Division of Psychology and Language Sciences.*

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#### **Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s):**

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#### **Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher:**

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#### **1. Invitation to take part in the research study**

We would like to invite you to take part in our research study. You should participate **only if you want to do so**. Before you decide whether to take part, we would like you to understand why the study is being carried out, what you would be asked to do, and how it will be carried out. Please take some time to read this information sheet thoroughly, and to discuss it with other people if you wish. One of our team will go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have on the day. Please feel free to **ask any further questions** about the study by contacting us on the above details, or if you find anything on this sheet unclear.

#### **2. What is the study's purpose?**

We are interested in the effects of **experiencing self-compassion through a virtual reality paradigm** and how this process is sometimes blocked for some people. We are particularly interested in the potential beneficial effects of this experience for individuals who are **high in self-criticism** and may find it harder (for a variety of reasons) to be compassionate to themselves. This project is specifically designed for people in the **helping professions** as research suggests that this population are likely to experience high self-criticism and mental health problems, in part due to the frequency and nature of **pressures faced in the workplace**, and because it is also recognized that self-critical individuals often report **fears, blocks, and resistances** to compassion-focused interventions.

#### **3. What is the criteria to be a participant in the study?**

You are an adult currently **training or working in a helping profession** (such as healthcare, nursing, medicine, therapy, psychology, social work, frontline/emergency response, etc.), are experiencing moderate to high levels of self-criticism, **live in the London region or within travelling distance**, and have good fluency in the English language. You are **not** currently engaging in another psychological treatment, experiencing auditory or visual hallucinations, at risk of self-harm or suicide, or have current substance use. You do **not** have a history of significant motion sickness or active nausea and vomiting, have an uncorrected hearing or visual impairment, a head or neck injury or musculoskeletal problems, vestibular/balance issues, an organic brain disorder or history of seizures, brain injury or epilepsy, or have a diagnosed heart condition such as arrhythmia or hypertension. We are aiming for up to 80 participants in this study.

#### 4. Do I have to take part?

No. Your participation is entirely **voluntary**. It is your choice whether or not you would like to participate. If you do give consent to take part in the study, you are still free to leave the study at any point, without giving a reason. If you leave, any information for the research that we have already collected from you will be destroyed.

#### 5. What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to attend a session at **University College London (UCL)**. We will go through this information sheet and answer any questions you might have about the study.

You will complete some questionnaires and take part in a virtual reality experience where you are guided through both giving and receiving compassion. Below is a summary of what the study will entail from start to finish:

- You will be asked to complete a number of **questionnaires** which look at your knowledge and experience of compassion and self-criticism, symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress, experience of positive emotions, recall of safe and warm feelings from your childhood, and your professional quality of life.
- The researcher will give you information and video resources to watch about compassion based on current psychological knowledge and practice in **Compassion-Focused Therapy**. Later, you will also be asked to recall a recent time at work where you were self-critical. The researcher will give you task instructions and guide you through reading a 'compassionate script'. You will have opportunities to ask questions and practice lines to ensure you feel comfortable expressing yourself.
- You will take part in the **virtual reality experience** where you will embody a virtual avatar and will experience both practising and receiving self-compassion. This interaction will be recorded which you will be sent a copy of and asked to re-watch if helpful over the following two-weeks.
- We will ask you to complete a number of the same questionnaires again.
- Following the intervention, you will be asked to complete **daily mirror practice** of the compassionate message for two-weeks. This should take no longer than five-minutes per day.
- Two-weeks after the daily mirror practice, you will be sent the same questionnaires again to complete.

At the end of the face-to-face session, the study researcher will conduct a **debriefing** and address any other questions or concerns you may have. The duration may vary from person to person, but **we expect it to take no longer than 90 minutes**.

We will also ask you whether you would like to **participate in a 1:1 interview** following the intervention, which will be optional. If you agree to this and are selected, it will be conducted between **4-8 weeks after the intervention**. It will either be conducted online or in-person, depending on what is most accessible for you.

The interview should take approximately **45 minutes**. You will be asked a series of **questions around your experience of the intervention and its effects for you**.

#### 6. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Immersive VR can induce disorientation and, in very rare cases, nausea. These problems are **unlikely to occur** during this study as we are using a set-up in which the virtual and physical movements are always synchronised. **We will support you** if you become upset or distressed during the study. You will be given time at the end of the study to be fully debriefed with a member of the research team.

Similarly, if you choose to take part in an interview, you will be supported if you feel upset or distressed by any of the material covered in the interview.

#### 7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Previous studies using a similar immersive virtual reality intervention have found **positive effects** for participants who have been involved – participants have reported a significant increase in positive emotions and a reduction in negative emotions following the experience. It has also been found that the experience has led to a decrease in self-criticism and an increase in self-compassion. While we cannot promise or guarantee any benefits, there are hoped benefits of **improving participants' professional quality of life**. We also hope that another possible effect of this experience could be a **change in people's attitude towards compassion**. The intervention provides **training and practice into self-compassion** applied to workplace situations. You will be **paid £10** to take part in this research. There will be additional money available for participation in an interview after the intervention.

#### 8. What if something goes wrong?

If you have further questions or concerns regarding participation in this research study, you may contact one of the researchers detailed on this form. If you are unhappy with how you have been treated or if you have been injured whilst participating in this study, please contact the Principal Investigator (Prof. John King). If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way (by a researcher or Principal Investigator), you should contact the Chair of the **UCL Ethics Committee** ([ethics@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@ucl.ac.uk)).

#### 9. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept **strictly confidential**. The data collected from you will be pseudonymised and stored on UCL password protected computers. You will not be able to be identified in any ensuing reports or publications.

#### 10. Limits to confidentiality

Confidentiality will be respected unless there are compelling and **legitimate reasons for this to be breached**, such as concerns of risk to yourself and/or others. If this was the case, we would inform you of any decisions that might limit your confidentiality.

#### 11. What will happen to the results of the research project?

The data will be used only for the purpose of informing the research questions in this study and will **only be accessed by the research team**. The results may be **published in scientific journals**, but you will in no way be identifiable. We would be happy to send you a copy of any publications arising from the research or a summary of the main findings. The data will be **retained for at least 10 years** and may be accessed in the future by the research team for comparison with future data. Prof. John King is custodian of the data.

#### 12. Data Protection Privacy Notice

The data controller for this project will be **UCL**. The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk).

Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this notice. The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data will be the **provision of your consent**. You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this project by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

***Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project.*** If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, please contact UCL in the first instance at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk). If you remain unsatisfied, you may wish to contact the **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)**. Contact details, and details of data subject rights, are available on the ICO website at: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-reform/overview-of-the-gdpr/individuals-rights/>

#### 13. Who is organising and funding the research?

The researchers organising this study are Emily Gosden, Kaan Gulum, and Mahum Mustafa, all Trainee Clinical Psychologists at UCL. The Principal Investigator overseeing the study is Professor John King, Clinical Psychologist at UCL. Emily and Kaan will be delivering the VR sessions, with the support of an undergraduate student, Sharvari Patil. Mahum will be carrying out the interviews. This research is funded by UCL as part of Emily, Kaan and Mahum's doctoral training.

**14. Contact for further information**

For questions and further information, please contact the **researchers** or the **Principal Investigator** (details at the top of the information sheet).

You will also be provided with a copy of this information sheet on the day to take it away with you.

**Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research study.**

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