

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**  
**UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH**  
**The factors contributing to stress, anxiety and depression in the mothers of children with autism.**

**Invitation**

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the causes of stress, anxiety and depression in the mothers of children with autism. Nick Falk, Psychology Masters Student, is conducting this research under the supervision of the Chief Investigator Dr Kimberley Norris, Associate Lecturer, School of Psychology, Faculty of Science, Engineering and Technology at the University of Tasmania. The research is being conducted in partial fulfilment of a Masters of Psychology degree for Nick Falk.

**1. What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of the study is to investigate the predictors of depression, anxiety and stress in the mothers of autistic children. Existing studies have shown that mothers of autistic children show higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress than mothers of 'developmentally normal' children. These mental health problems can be both traumatic for the mother, and make it more challenging for them to follow behavioural management programs recommended for the child. A better understanding of the predictors of these problems will inform the development of effective treatment programs to provide support for this parental group.

**2. Why have I been invited to participate in this study?**

You have been invited to participate as you are a mother with one or more children with a diagnosis of autism aged 4-18 years old. However, having a mental health problem yourself, now or at any time in the past, is not a prerequisite to take part in this study. We would like as wide a range of mothers with children with autism to take part as possible. We would be both grateful and interested in using your confidential responses to assist in our research.

**3. What does this study involve?**

You will be asked to complete an on-line questionnaire, containing self-rating, child-rating and demographic questions. The self-rating and child-rating questions focus on your relationship with your child, how you are currently feeling in life, an assessment of your child's behaviour, and a short set of questions relating to your child's diagnosis of autism. In answering questions you will be asked to focus on one child with autism only, aged between 4-18 years. The questionnaire should take 45-60 minutes to complete in your own time.

Once you have completed and submitted the questionnaire, the data will be sent to a secure server at the School of Psychology, and your identifying information will be replaced with a code to protect your identity. Coding of personal identifiers will occur before any other information you have provided is assessed. This process of coding ensures the investigators are 'blinded' to your personal information when viewing your questionnaire responses and therefore cannot identify you from your data.

It is important that you understand that your involvement in this study is voluntary. While we would be pleased to have you participate, we respect your right to decline. If you decide to discontinue participation at any time, you may do so without

providing an explanation. None of the information completed on-line will be made available to the research team until you have submitted it (you will be prompted to submit your information once you have completed the on-line questionnaire). Should you decide at any time not to submit the information, you can exit the Website and request that your information not be saved.

All information that is submitted will be treated in a confidential manner. All of the research will be kept in a locked cabinet in the School of Psychology and will be securely destroyed five years after publication of data.

#### **4. Are there any possible benefits from participation in this study?**

Stress, anxiety and depression can occur in all maternal groups, but particularly in the mothers of children with a diagnosed psychiatric illness, such as autism. By participating in this study, irrespective of whether you have ever experienced any mental health problems yourself, you will be helping us understand the challenges this group of parents face. This information will prove useful in structuring individual and group support programs that best meet the needs of mothers with autistic children. It is also possible that you will gain insights into the strategies you currently use which influence your own well-being, as well as the nature of your relationship with your child.

#### **5. Are there any possible risks from participation in this study?**

There are no specific risks anticipated with participation in this study. However, if you find that you are becoming uncomfortable, you are able to discontinue your participation at any time without prejudice. You can also contact the researchers, or telephone Lifeline or Beyondblue, two organisations that provide free confidential psychological support. (**Lifeline - Tel: 13 11 14; Beyondblue – Tel: 1 300 22 4636**).

#### **6. What if I have questions about this research?**

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study please feel free to contact either Dr Kimberley Norris (Chief Investigator) at Kimberley.Norris@utas.edu.au or Nick Falk (Student Researcher) at nhfalk@utas.edu.au. Either of us would be happy to discuss any aspect of the research with you. Once we have analysed the information a summary of the findings will be available on the School of Psychology website (<http://fcms.its.utas.edu.au/scieng/psychol/>). A copy of the study results can also be requested directly from the researchers.

This study has been approved by the Tasmanian Social Science Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study you should contact the Executive Officer of the HREC (Tasmania) Network on (03) 6226 7479 or email human.ethics@utas.edu.au. The Executive Officer is the person nominated to receive complaints from research participants.

**Thank you for taking the time to consider and participate in this study. Your completion and submission of the on-line questionnaire will provide consent for us to include your information in our experimental data set.**

**The questionnaire can be found using the following Weblink:**

<https://surveys.psychol.utas.edu.au/index.php?sid=75852&lang=en>