EXAMINATION OF THE WORKPLACE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSIOLOGICAL STRESS AND THE RETENTION OF DIRECT-CARE WORKERS IN AGED CARE

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| The research is being carried out in partial fulfilment of PhD under the supervision of Dr Brad Wright. The following researchers will be conducting the study: | | |
| **Role** | **Name** | **Organisation** |
| Chief Investigator | Dr Brad Wright  Senior Lecturer | Department of Psychology and Counselling,  La Trobe University |
| Co-investigator | Dr Rachael Heckenberg  Associate Lecturer | Department of Psychology and Counselling,  La Trobe University |
| Student Investigator | Monica Jones  Doctor of Philosophy (Psychology) Candidate | Department of Psychology and Counselling,  La Trobe University |
| **Research funder** | This research is supported by in-kind support from La Trobe University. | |

1. **What is the study about?**

You are invited to participate in a study of workplace stress in regional aged care workers. The experience of stress may cause physiological changes in immune and hormonal systems, and these changes can affect our mental and physical health. This study will be conducted in two stages. The first stage of this study aims to determine if a brief mobile phone mindfulness intervention is effective at reducing workplace stress in aged care workers. In addition, it will investigate acute improvements in mood, anxiety, emotions, and salivary alpha amylase (sAA) responses. It will establish the relationships between mindfulness, stress, and ill-health. The second stage of this study aims to measure the relationship between workplace stress, self-reported health, turnover intentions, and physiological markers of stress: salivary cortisol, sAA, and secretory immunoglobulin A (sIgA) in aged care workers. This information is important as it will improve our understanding of the effects of workplace stress on the immune and hormonal systems, self-reported health, and the onset of stress-related illness.

1. **Do I have to participate?**

Being part of this study is voluntary. Participation is voluntary and is not a requirement of your employment. If you want to be part of the study, we ask that you read the information below carefully and ask us any questions.

You can read the information below and decide at the end if you do not want to participate. If you decide not to participate this won’t affect your relationship with La Trobe University or any other listed organisation.

1. **Who is being asked to participate?**

You have been asked to participate because:

* You are a direct care worker employed by an aged care service provider. To participate you must be aged over 18 years, be working a minimum of 20 hours per week, and have been employed in your current role for at least three months. You are primarily employed in a direct-care position. Individuals using hormone replacement therapy are asked to exclude themselves from the study as these medications can affect the ability to determine accurate concentrations of the physiological measures. As participation is voluntary, individuals may also self-exclude for any personal or undisclosed reasons.

1. **What will I be asked to do?**

If you want to take part in this study, we will ask you to take part in both stages of the study. For both stages of the study, we will ask you to complete questionnaires and provide saliva samples. Saliva samples are provided by placing a cotton swab in your mouth for one minute, before placing it into a test tube. Step-by-step instructions will be provided.

For the first stage of the study, we will ask you to engage in a 3-week mindfulness program delivered via the smartphone application ‘Smiling Mind’. This application is free to download and you will be provided access to the Healthcare Workers Program. The application may be accessed on workplace devices where available. The mindfulness program involves engaging in guided mindfulness mediation for approximately 15 minutes per day for 3 weeks. You will be asked to log your participation in the meditation sessions. At the end of the intervention, you will be asked to provide the email address used to register with Smiling Mind; this is to provide the researchers details of how often the app was used and for how long each session lasted.

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire and provide a saliva sample immediately before and after one mindfulness meditation each week. The mindfulness meditation on these occasions is to be completed at the same time of day in the afternoon. The questionnaire (27 questions) will assess different mood states, anxiety and emotions. The saliva sample will be used to measure sAA. Immediately before and immediately after the formal practice, you will provide a saliva sample (approximately 1 teaspoon of saliva) following the provided instructions.

For comparison, on three occasions when you are **not** undertaking the 3-week mindfulness program, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and provide a saliva sample. You will be asked to complete another questionnaire and provide a second sample 15 minutes later.

For the second stage of the study, you will be asked to complete questionnaires (approximately 150 questions) that assess workplace stress, self-reported health, turnover intentions, and demographic information (e.g. age, gender, etc.). You will also be asked to provide two saliva samples on two consecutive working days. You will be asked to do this on three separate occasions, across a period of 4 months. **The first sample will be provided immediately upon awakening** and used to collect cortisol and sAA. **The second saliva sample will be provided 30 minutes after awakening** and used to collect cortisol, sAA, and sIgA. You will be asked to provide another two saliva samples on the following day. You will be asked to place the saliva samples into your freezer upon collection. The total testing time is approximately 30-40 minutes. You will be asked to place the completed questionnaires in a secure drop-box and the saliva samples in a freezer, both located at your workplace. The researchers will then collect both questionnaires and saliva samples from the workplace.

The questionnaires and saliva samples will not have any identifying information on them, instead, you will be assigned a 3-digit code so your data can be kept together and matched to each stage. The 3-digit code will already be marked on the questionnaires and test tubes for the saliva samples when they are given to you. If upon collection any identified information is on the questionnaires or saliva samples, this will be removed by the researcher. All saliva samples will be destroyed after assessment.

1. **What are the benefits?**

Participation in the research will contribute to extending the current understanding of workplace stress for aged care workers. You may find participating in the study beneficial as it could help you become aware of some of the characteristics you find demands and rewarding about your job. Alternatively, you may not find any personal benefit to participating.

Mindfulness-based stress reduction programs have been shown to reduce workplace stress, as well as increase work engagement, and improve decision making, memory, and concentration. You may find participating in this study beneficial as you could experience reduced stress and negative mood states, and well as increased positive mood states.

The results from this study will help provide support for an easily implemented, online intervention ideal for the workplace to reduce stress. This study will also help increase our understanding of how mindfulness may improve stress and self-reported health. The results from the study will help improve current understanding by identifying what components of the workplace may contribute to ill-health. In addition, understanding which biomarkers are most related to stress measures will increase our understanding of the underlying mechanisms of the relationship between stress and ill-health. This increased knowledge can then help inform workplace stress interventions.

1. **What are the risks?**

With any study, there are (1) risks we know about, (2) risks we don’t know about and (3) risks we don’t expect. We have listed the risks we know about below. This will help you decide if you want to be part of the study.

Although we are studying workplace stress and ill-health in your occupation, this is not to say you are at higher risk than other employees. Workplace stress is common in many jobs. The aim of this research is to provide you with resources to deal with stress.

It is not expected that you will experience any harm from the study. However, it is possible you may experience some discomfort and/or negative emotions when engaging in the formal practice. The program provides instructions on how to deal with these feelings. You may also experience discomfort given the study asks you questions about stress and wellbeing.

If you experience more than discomfort while answering questions or after completion of the study, please contact Mindspot on 1800 61 44 34 or visit their website https://mindspot.org.au/. For 24-hour crisis support contact Lifeline by telephone 13 11 14. You may access support through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offered by your organisation. Alternatively, you may wish to speak to your doctor for local support.

1. **What will happen to information about me?**

We will **collect** information about you in ways that potentially will reveal who you are. Your contact details (name, telephone, email) will be collected and stored separately to the study data. By consenting to take part in the research, you also consent to the collection, storage and use of tissue samples. No genetic material will be extracted from your saliva samples and all analyses will be conducted by La Trobe University staff. It is anticipated that within 4 months of collection, all samples will have been analysed and destroyed. The results of this analysis will be stored electronically.

We will **store** information about you in ways that potentially will reveal who you are. All information collected in this study will be securely stored and only accessed by the researchers. Only the researchers and your team leaders will know you have participated in the program. Only the researchers will have access to your raw data. Your data will be de-identified, except to the researchers. Individual codes will be used to match questionnaire responses with physiological samples across the stages of data collection. The raw data will be kept for seven years, as required by law, after that time all raw data will be destroyed.

We will **publish** information about you in ways that you will not be identified in any type of publication from this study. Group results will be included in a thesis and may be presented at conferences and incorporated in scientific publications. This study is partially funded by your employer. A report of group findings will be presented to your employer. This report will not include any individual data and personal details of the participants.

We will **keep** the raw data for seven years after the project is completed, as required by law. After that time all raw data will be destroyed.

The storage, transfer, and destruction of your data will be undertaken in accordance with the [Research Data Management Policy](https://policies.latrobe.edu.au/document/view.php?id=106/) <https://policies.latrobe.edu.au/document/view.php?id=106/>.

The personal information you provide will be handled in accordance with applicable privacy laws, any health information collected will be handled in accordance with the Health Records Act 2001 (Vic). Subject to any exceptions in relevant laws, you have the right to access and correct your personal information by contacting the research team.

1. **Will I hear about the results of the study?**

If you are interested in the group results of this study, a summary of findings will be available from [DATE]. You may request a copy by contacting Monica Jones (mt4jones@students.latrobe.edu.au). After collection of the data at all stages of data collection, your data will be de-identified, therefore information pertaining to your individual results will not be possible.

1. **What if I change my mind?**

At any time, you can choose to no longer be part of the study. You can let us know by:

1. Completing the ‘Withdrawal of Consent Form’ (provided at the end of this document);
2. Calling us; or
3. Emailing us

There are no disadvantages, penalties or adverse consequences for choosing not to participate in this research. Your decision to withdraw at any point will **not** affect your relationship with La Trobe University or any other organisation listed.

You have the right to withdraw your active participation from the study at any time up until your data is submitted, after which point your data will be de-identified. However, once the results have been submitted, we can only withdraw information, such as your name and contact details. When you withdraw we will stop asking you for information. Any identifiable information about you will be withdrawn from the research study.

1. **Who can I contact for questions or want more information?**

If you would like to speak to us, please use the contact details below:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Position** | **Telephone** | **Email** |
| Dr Brad Wright | Senior Lecturer,  School of Psychology and Public Health | 03 9479 2348 | b.wright@latrobe.edu.au |
| Monica Jones | PhD Candidate  School of Psychology and Public Health | 02 6024 9707 | mt4jones@students.latrobe.edu.au |

1. **What if I have a complaint?**

If you have a complaint about any part of this study, please contact: humanethics@latrobe.edu.au

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| **Ethics Reference Number** | **Position** | **Telephone** | **Email** |
| HEC19183 | Senior Research Ethics Officer | 03 9479 1443 | humanethics@latrobe.edu.au |

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**Consent Form – Declaration by Participant**

I (the participant) have read (or, where appropriate, have had read to me) and understood the participant information statement, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the study, I know I can withdraw at any time. I agree information provided by me or with my permission during the project may be included in a thesis, presentation and published in journals on the condition that I cannot be identified.

I would like my information collected for this research study to be:

Only used for this specific study;

Used for future related studies;

Used for any future studies.

I agree to have biospecimens collected;

I would like to receive a copy of the results via email or post. I have provided my details below and ask that they only are used for this purpose and not stored with my information or for future contact.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Email (optional)** | **Postal address (optional)** |
|  |  |  |

**Participant Signature**

I have received a signed copy of the Participant Information Statement and Consent Form to keep

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Participant’s printed name |  |
| Participant’s signature |  |
| Date |  |

**Declaration by Researcher**

I have given a verbal explanation of the study, what it involves, and the risks and I believe the participant has understood;

I am a person qualified to explain the study, the risks and answer questions.

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| --- | --- |
| Researcher’s printed name |  |
| Researcher’s signature |  |
| Date |  |

\* All parties must sign and date their own signature

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**Withdrawal of Consent**

I wish to withdraw my consent to participate in this study. I understand withdrawal will not affect my relationship with La Trobe University of any other organisation or professionals listed in the Participant Information Statement. I understand the researchers cannot withdraw my information once it has been submitted.

**I understand my information will be withdrawn as outlined below:**

* Any identifiable information about me will be withdrawn from the study.
* The researchers will withdraw my contact details so I cannot be contacted by them in future studies.
* The researchers cannot withdraw my information once it has been submitted.

I would like my already collected and unanalysed data

Destroyed and not used for any analysis

Used for analysis

**Participant Signature**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Participant’s printed name |  |
| Participant’s signature |  |
| Date |  |

**Please forward this form to:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Chief Investigator’s name | Dr Bradley Wright |
| Email | b.wright@latrobe.edu.au |
| Phone | 03 9479 3086 |
| Postal Address | Department of Psychology and Counselling  George Singer Building  Kingsbury Drive  Bundoora, Victoria 3086 |