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Research study information leaflet and consent form

[This consent form is a public-facing document and must be clear, professional, and easy to read. Attention should be given to grammar, font size, and overall formatting to ensure accessibility for all participants. The final form should be professionally presented and language edited. The UFS provides all postgraduate students with access to Grammarly. If your participants include those with limited education or disadvantaged backgrounds, forms should be presented at a Grade 6 reading level. The form should speak directly to the participant, using clear and respectful language. For example, use phrases such as: *"You are being invited to take part in this study …"* This direct approach helps participants understand their role and rights in the study.

All instructions and explanations are in square brackets and should be addressed if applicable or deleted if not applicable. Anything outside the square brackets are elements that are part of the consent form.]

Date

[Date range of the research project]

Title of the research project

[Insert the title of the research project. Simplify if necessary]

Principle investigator / researcher(s) name(s) and contact number(s):

Name of student/researcher	Student number	Contact number
Name of student/researcher	Student number	Contact number

Faculty and department:

Name of faculty
Name of department

Study leader's(s') name and contact number:

[remove the plural (s) if not applicable]
Name of study leader (UFS staff member)
Contact number [Only include office phone numbers, unless you have the supervisor's consent to add their cellphone number.]

What is the aim/purpose of the study?

[Explain the aim of the study and why you are conducting the study. Do not copy from your proposal, as this should be a simple explanation that the participants will understand.]

Who is doing the research?

[Identify yourself and explain who you work for and/or why you are doing the project.

The researcher should identify themselves by writing their full name. They should also explain who they are working for – for example, whether they are conducting the research as part of their job (staff research) or as part of their studies (e.g., for a university degree). This information should be clearly stated so that participants understand who is doing the research and why.

University students should avoid professionalising the consent form by including their job title or the name of the organisation where they work, unless their job title or employer could be perceived as a conflict of interest, in which case the relationship should be explained, and any fears alleviated or unfulfilled expectations discussed. This helps ensure that participants do not feel pressured to participate in the study based on the student's professional position or authority.]

Has the study received ethical approval?

This study has received approval from the General Human Research Ethics Committee of the UFS. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher.

Approval number: Insert approval number

Why are you invited to take part in this research project?

[Why did you choose this particular person/group as participant(s)? Describe how and from whom you obtained the participants' contact details and how and why you chose this particular person/group of participants. Indicate the approximate number of participants.

Researchers should speak directly to the participants taking part in the study.]

You are invited to take part in this study because you are part of a group that can help us better understand [insert topic or issue being studied].

I am/We are inviting approximately [insert number] people to take part in the study. Participants were selected because [insert reason, e.g., they meet certain criteria, have specific experience, belong to a particular group, etc.].

[Only when applicable:] Your contact details were obtained from [briefly explain the source, e.g., public records, a school list, organisation database, through your institution, or you volunteered to participate], and all information has been handled with care and confidentiality.

What is the nature of participation in this study?

[Describe the participant's actual role in the study, avoiding any technical terms that would not be appropriate for the participant. After reading, participants should be clear about what they are agreeing to. Indicate what sort of questions will be asked or show the questions in this document. Describe the expected duration of participation and the time needed to complete specific research activities such as questionnaires, focus groups, or interviews. Describe the time allocated to conduct interviews/focus groups – be realistic in your approximation.

Clearly indicate whether participants will be involved in only one form of data collection or in multiple (such as interviews and observations). Describe each method of participation separately and ensure that the procedures, duration, and data collection tools are clearly explained. It is recommended that separate consent forms be used if the data collection methods and participants are diverse to allow participants to make an informed decision about each aspect of the study. Participants should not be reading about anything they will not be participating in. If the data is collected in phases, it would also be appropriate to reconsent participants in each subsequent phase.]

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in [e.g., an interview/focus group / complete a questionnaire / be observed/take part in a survey].

The study involves [e.g., audio recording, video recording, note-taking] so that we can accurately capture your responses.

You will be asked questions about [briefly describe the topic, e.g., your experiences with ..., your views on ..., your knowledge of ...].

Your participation will take approximately [insert duration, e.g., 30-45 minutes for interviews, 10-15 minutes for questionnaires, etc.].

[Example of observations:] During the observation, we will watch and take notes on specific behaviours or activities related to the study topic. We will be observing you while you are doing activities related to this study. This means we will watch what you are doing, take notes, and only focus on things that are relevant to the research topic. You will not be asked to do anything unusual; just carry on as you normally would.

Can the participant withdraw from the study?

State that participation is voluntary and that there is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation. Do not mislead your potential participants by stating that they can withdraw from a research project at any time if the project involves the submission of non-identifiable material such as questionnaires. Make it clear to them that it will not be possible to withdraw once they have submitted the questionnaire.]

You are invited to take part in this study, but your participation is entirely voluntary. You are under no obligation to agree, and choosing not to participate will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. If you decide to participate, you will receive this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason, and this will not affect your rights or any services you receive. *Please note:* If you are participating by submitting an anonymous questionnaire, your responses cannot be withdrawn once you have submitted them, because they are not linked to your identity.

What are the potential benefits of taking part in this study?

[Describe the presence or absence of realistic possible benefits for participants and/or society. Do not overstate benefits that may result or create expectations that you cannot fulfil in the time and with the resources available.]

There may be no direct personal benefits to you for taking part in this study. However, your participation will help us gain a better understanding of [insert topic], which may help improve [insert area of impact – e.g., services, policies, practices, etc.] in the future. This could benefit other individuals or groups in similar situations.

What is the anticipated inconvenience of taking part in this study?

[Describe any potential level of inconvenience and/or discomfort to the participant. List all possible or reasonably foreseeable risks of harm or side effects to the potential participants, outlining likely incidence and severity. The risks identified in the risk section of the application form should be clearly reflected and discussed in this section to ensure consistency, and mitigations should be provided. Describe the measures that will be taken if injury or harm attributable to the study occurs. If applicable, add a description of any arrangements for indemnity and/or insurance coverage for participants.

Example (only applicable if the risk-benefit section has highlighted the potential loss of study time or emotional distress):] Taking part in this study may take up some of your work or personal time, but we will make sure that the activities (interviews/focus group sessions, questionnaire, observation, etc.) are scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. If you feel uncomfortable or upset at any point, you are free to stop. A counsellor will be available to assist you should you experience any emotional discomfort [contact details should be provided: attach a letter from the counsellor stating that they are aware and that they will be able to assist for free].

Will what I say be kept confidential?

[Include only the information that aligns with your chosen data collection method. Do not mention, for instance, focus groups if your study involves only interviews.

Example:

Interviews:] Your name will not be recorded anywhere, and your responses will be kept confidential. Instead of your real name, we will use a code or pseudonym. The interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accurate reporting, but only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the recordings. Your data may also be reviewed by the university's Research Ethics Committee as part of their responsibility to ensure that the research is conducted properly. All recordings and transcripts will be stored securely. Your anonymised responses may be used in other academic work, such as journal publications, research reports, or conference presentations, but you will not be personally identified in any of these outputs. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in any way. Participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study if you do not want to, and you can stop at any time without giving a reason and without facing any penalty or consequence.

[Focus Group Discussions:] The focus group discussion will be audio-recorded for accuracy. Your name will not be used in any report or publication. However, please note that while the researcher will treat all information as confidential, confidentiality among group members cannot be guaranteed. While every effort will be made by the researcher to ensure that you will not be connected to the information you share during the focus group, I cannot guarantee that other participants in the focus group will treat the information confidentially. I would, however, encourage all participants to do so. For this reason, I advise you not to disclose personally sensitive information in the focus group. We will use pseudonyms in any reports and exclude identifying information. A report may be submitted for publication, but your identity will not be revealed. You do not have to take part in this study if you do not want to, and you can stop at any time without giving a reason and without facing any penalty or consequence.

[Observations:] The observation will be video recorded to help us remember what happened more accurately [if applicable]. If we plan to record the observation, we will ask for your permission first. You can say no to being recorded and still take part in the study. We will not use your name in any notes or reports. Everything we collect will be kept safe and private. Only the researcher and the supervisor will be able to see the information. If the study is shared through a report, journal article, or presentation, we will make sure that no one can tell that it is you. You do not have to take part in this study if you do not want to, and you can stop at any time without giving a reason and without facing any penalty or consequence.

Questionnaires: The questionnaire will not ask for your name, and your answers will remain anonymous [do not promise anonymity if you know who completed which questionnaire, as this is confidentiality, not anonymity]. Once you have submitted your responses, it will not be possible to withdraw your answers, because there will be no way to identify which ones are yours. Only the researcher and supervisor will access the data. Your anonymised responses may be used in research reports, journal articles, or conference presentations. A report may be submitted for publication, but no one will be able to identify you from it. You do not have to take part in this study if you do not want to, and you can stop at any time without giving a reason and without facing any penalty or consequence.

[Additionally, this may be applicable to fieldwork assistants, transcribers, or statisticians:] If a transcriber or an external coder is used to assist with data processing, they will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement to ensure that your privacy is protected (attach the letter from the statistician or transcriber).

How will the information be stored and ultimately destroyed?

Hard copies of your answers [only if there will be hard copies such as pen-and-paper questionnaires, notes, or observations] and the signed consent form will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years [if the data will be retained longer or permanently, this must be stated] in a locked filing cabinet located in the [insert specific location, e.g., Department of

Psychology office at XYZ University]. Electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer/online on [if applicable, specifically state which POPIA-compliant cloud data collection and storage solutions you will use] that meets POPIA security standards, accessible only to the researcher and the research supervisor.

After the five-year storage period, all hard-copy documents will be securely shredded, and all electronic files will be permanently deleted from the system. [If any data will be kept longer than this, explain what data will be kept and state when and how it will be deidentified.]

If the data is considered for future use (for academic or research purposes), this will only occur with additional ethical clearance and approval from a recognised research ethics committee. Your information will remain confidential and anonymised in all future uses.

Will I receive payment or any incentives for participating in this study?

[Describe any payment or reward offered, financial or otherwise. Any costs incurred by the participant should be explained and justified. Add a description of any arrangements for indemnity and/or insurance coverage for participants, if applicable.]

[Example when there is a small payment for participation:] You will receive a small reimbursement to cover your transport costs, as well as some refreshments during the study sessions. This is to make it easier for you to take part and to thank you for your time. Please remember, this reimbursement is not meant to pressure or force you to participate – joining the study is completely your choice.

[Example when there is no payment:] You will not receive any payment or reward for taking part in this study. Participation is completely voluntary, and if you choose not to take part, you will not lose any benefits or rights.

How will the participants be informed of the findings/results of the study?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact [insert researcher's name] on [insert telephone number] or [insert email address]. The findings are accessible for [insert time frame]. [Please do not use home telephone numbers. Departmental and/or cell numbers are acceptable.] Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact [insert principal researcher's contact details here, including email and internal phone number]. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research was conducted, you may contact [insert supervisor's contact details here, including email and internal phone number]. You can contact the university's General Human Research Ethics Committee at [ethics contact details]. They are there to help you.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Consent to participate in this study

I, the undersigned,

_____
(participant's full names to be included), (the 'participant')

confirm that I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study being conducted by

_____
(insert the name of the researcher), (the '**researcher**').

I, the undersigned, further confirm that–

1. the researcher has explained the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of my participation in the study;
2. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the attached information sheet;
3. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study;
4. I understand that my participation in the study is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable);
5. I voluntarily provide the UFS and the researcher with my personal information and consent to the UFS and the researcher to collect, disclose, and process my personal information in order to conduct the study and any related activities;
6. I understand the purpose for which the UFS and the researcher may collect, store, use, delete, destroy, outsource, transfer or otherwise process, as the context and circumstances may require and as contemplated in terms of POPIA, my personal information as set out herein;
7. I am aware that the findings of the study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications, and/or conference proceedings, and that my personal information will be aggregated and deidentified at such stage; and
8. I also give the UFS permission to share, without notification, the collected data with other researchers at the UFS or other higher education institutions. This permission is dependent on the same principles of ethical research practices, anonymity/confidentiality, safekeeping of information, and other issues listed above.

I, the participant, agree to the recording of the [insert specific data collection method interview/observation/focus group/ questionnaire, as applicable].

Full name of participant: _____

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

Full name(s) of researcher(s): _____

Signature of researcher: _____Date: _____