**This is a student project for the researcher’s MSc Psychology conversion program.**

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| TITLE OF PROJECT | An interpretative phenomenological analysis exploring the experiences of young adults with autism spectrum disorders in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic. |
| NAME OF RESEARCHER | Maddison York |
| NAME OF SUPERVISOR | Casey Edmonds |

Dear Participant,

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide if you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the information below carefully. You can talk about the study with other people if you wish. Feel free to contact the researcher (contact details provided below) if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

**Thank you for your time.**

**What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of young adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) during the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19) and the lockdown. It is hoped that through asking individuals about their experiences, in particular how their mental health and daily routines may have been affected, we can reach a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities that they have faced thus far. There are still many gaps in our understanding of the best ways to support young adults with ASD within the current pandemic, and beyond. Research is crucial to fill these gaps, and therefore, your views are very important.

**Why have I been chosen?**

You have been invited to participate in the study as you are a young adult between the ages of 18-35, with a diagnosis of ASD. You have also been chosen, as you have been a resident of the UK for at least a year.

**Do I have to take part in the study?**

As participation is voluntary, it is entirely up to you whether or not you would like to take part in the study. If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason. If you decide not to take part, or withdraw from this study, there will be no consequences.

**What will I be asked to do if I take part in the study?**

If you would like to take part in the study, you will be invited to have a 5-10 minute chat with the student researcher before the interview, to make sure that you are suitable for the study and that you fully understand what is expected of you. During this chat, yourself and the researcher will arrange a date, time and method of interview that best suits you. You will have the opportunity to ask any questions about the research. If you are happy to take part, the researcher will ask you to sign and date the enclosed consent form and return it to the researcher by the email address provided below.

Due to the current restrictions, policies about social distancing will be adhered to. The place of interview can be of your own choice. For example, you may choose to have your interview in an outdoor area such as a park, café or library, by video call on Skype, Zoom or Teams, by phone or another method you are most comfortable with. The interview will involve some questions relating to your experience of COVID-19 and lockdown. The conversation during your interview will be confidential and you will have as much time as you like to think about and answer the questions. The interview is expected to last up to an hour, and breaks will be offered if needed. Your interview will be audio-recorded, using a transcription app called “Otter notes” with your permission. These transcriptions will be later typed out and made anonymous so that no one can link your responses to the questions to your name.

**What are the possible risks of taking part?**

Whilst there a no immediate risks or disadvantages in taking part within this study, there are questions that may cause some minor discomfort. For instance, questions about mental health or social isolation may create upset. If at any point you were to feel uncomfortable or become upset during the interview, you can request a break. If you decide that you do not wish to carry on, the interview can be stopped. You do not have to answer all of the questions asked and can stop answering at any time.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for taking part in the study, it is hoped that your interview responses will help towards building and shaping a better understanding of the experiences of young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders during COVID-19 and the lockdown, and therefore how we can best assist those with autism in the event of future public health crises.

**Who will know that I am taking part?**

The only people who will know that you are taking part will be yourself, the researcher conducting and managing the study, the researcher’s supervisor and any other individuals who you personally decide to tell about your participation.

**Will my details be kept confidential?**

Yes. All information that is collected during the course of the study will be kept confidential at all times and in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018. Your data will be kept confidential, unless the researcher is required to produce it by law, or if something that is spoken about during the interview is a cause for concern, or potential harm to yourself or others. You will not be able to be identified in the research findings. Your information will only be included in these materials in an anonymous form, through the use of pseudonyms which will replace your real name. Any written reports about the study will not include personal information.

**How will records from the study be stored?**

The records from the study will be stored in private locations. Hard copies containing any personally identifiable data, such as participant names, will be kept behind a locked private office in a secure filing cabinet, accessed only by the researcher. No external persons will have access to this data. Electronic data, including digitised versions of consent forms, will be placed into a password-protected storage file, behind a password-protected laptop. These documents will be stored securely on the researcher’s personal laptop and no other portable devices.

Whilst anonymous data will be stored indefinitely, any hard copies containing personal information will be destroyed via a paper shredder and disposed of sensibly, and any electronic copies containing personal information will be removed from the storage files on the researcher’s password-protected laptop. Removal of this personal information will occur after the student researcher has received the results of their research, and upon passing their MSc Psychology conversion program.

### **What happens when the research project stops?**

When the research project stops, you will be thanked for your time and participation. The researcher will provide you with a debriefing statement, that you will have as much time as you need to read. This debriefing statement will outline the purpose of the research you have participated in. You will be encouraged to ask any questions or raise any concerns you may have about your participation with the researcher. In the event that you require access to further support, the debrief form contains the contact information of the research supervisor which you will be advised to contact, particularly if you experience concerns for your own mental wellbeing, along with the contact details of organisations that you may wish to contact. The debrief form will also remind you of your right to withdraw your data from the study if you require.

**What will you do with the findings of the study?**

The findings of the study will be reported in writing as a dissertation, as part fulfilment of the student researcher’s MSc Psychology conversion qualification. Results of this research may be published and/or presented in a variety of forums. However, no information about your identity will be revealed. You have the right to request access to the information about you that is collected and stored by the research team. If you would like to receive this, please inform the researcher’s supervisor named at the end of this document.

**Who is organising and paying for the study?**

The researcher conducting the study is a student at BPP University. The study is being co-ordinated by the BPP University. The study has been reviewed and approved by the BPP University Research Ethics Committee (BPPU REC).

**What if I want to complain?**

If you wish to make a complaint, please contact:

Student’s supervisor: Casey Edmonds, BPP Lecturer and Research Fellow (email: CaseyEdmonds@bpp.com)

Professor Adrian Hunnisett, BPPU Research Director, (email: adrianhunnisett@bpp.com)

**How can I contact the study team?**

If you have any further questions about the study, or your involvement in it, either now or in the future, please contact the student’s supervisor (email as above).