**Participant Information Sheet**

**Name of department: School of Psychological Sciences and Health**  
**Title of the study: *Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and Loneliness in Chinese International Students***

**Introduction**

We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. Before you decide to do so, it is important you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part. The Principle Investigator of this study is Dr Xi Liu ([x.liu.101@strath.ac.uk](mailto:x.liu.101@strath.ac.uk)) from the School of Psychological Sciences and Health at the University of Strathclyde. Yvonne Chin-Van Chau is the Student Research Assistant for the study, and three Chinese international students (CISs) are involved as co-researchers: Helin Zhao (University of Strathclyde), Jifan Ren (University of Strathclyde) and Zhun Tang (Imperial College London). The Co Investigators are listed at the end of this sheet.

Thanks for reading this.

**What is the purpose of this investigation?**

Previous research has shown that loneliness is common among international university students, but little research has examined loneliness among Chinese international students (CISs). Mindfulness training may help people feel less lonely. Mindfulness means maintaining a non-judgmental awareness of our thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), one of the most recognised mindfulness-based interventions, has been shown to be effective in reducing loneliness in university students. However, how well it would work for CISs has not been studied. This research project aims to explore how Chinese international students understand and experience loneliness, and how MBCT can be culturally adapted for CISs experiencing loneliness.

**Do you have to take part?**

No, you do not have to take part in this research. If you do decide to take part, then we will ask you to sign a consent form.

Participation is completely confidential and voluntary. Neither refusing to participate nor withdrawing participation will have any influence on you. If you agree to take part in the study, you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to and you can withdraw your participation at any time without giving a reason. You can request for your data to be withdrawn until August 2022. This is because the data will be anonymised and there is no way to identify your data.

**What will you do in the project?**

If you agree to take part, we will ask you to sign a consent form. You will be given this information sheet to keep. There are three stages in this study: an individual interview, a MBCT workshop, and a focus group. You will be invited to engage in a brief screening interview with Dr Xi Liu right before attending the interview and the focus group.

1. Individual Interviews: You will be invited to attend a one-to-one online interview session with one of the student researchers (Yvonne Chin-Van Chau, Helin Zhao, Jifan Ren, Zhun Tang) to talk about your understandings and experiences of loneliness. You will be invited to share your thoughts and experiences using images. You could bring to the interview your own drawings or photos, magazine images/online images of your choice, etc. You can prepare the image beforehand or create an image during the interview. If you choose to draw an image, please note that the artistic quality of the drawing is not important - rather it is simply a means to capture your understandings and experiences of loneliness. It is also ok to have a verbal-only interview if you prefer. An example of types of questions you will be asked are as follows: “What does loneliness mean to you?”; “How does the image reflect your experience of loneliness?”; “How has loneliness affected your student life in the UK?”.

2. One to two weeks after the interview, you will be invited to attend an online workshop on mindfulness and MBCT(This website contains useful information about mindfulness and MBCT: <https://mbct.co.uk/>). The workshop will be delivered by Dr Xi Liu, who is a qualified counsellor and mindfulness teacher. The workshop will last about two hours and consist of a presentation and a few experiential mindfulness exercises. If you cannot/prefer not to take part in the workshop but still would like to attend a focus group, we will provide you with relevant material on mindfulness and MBCT (handouts, short videos, etc.) that you can read/watch in your own time.

3. Focus Groups: You will be invited to take part in a focus group discussing how MBCT can be adapted for CIS's loneliness. The focus group will be scheduled one week after the workshop. The focus groups will be facilitated by Yvonne Chin-Van Chau and one co-researcher (Helin Zhao, Jifan Ren or Zhun Tang), and moderated by another member of the research team. Example questions are: “How do you feel about the MBCT course?”; “What cultural factors should be considered when delivering MBCT to Chinese international students experiencing loneliness?”

You can take part in the interview only, but you cannot only attend the focus group because the discussion will build on the interviews. As a thank you for your time, you will receive a £20 Amazon voucher for taking part in the individual interview, and another £30 Amazon voucher if you attend the focus group.

The interview and the focus group will be conducted online via Zoom at a mutually convenient time. Normally the interview will take no longer than 60 minutes, and the focus group will last no longer than 90 minutes. With your consent, the interview and the focus group will be recorded using the recording function in Zoom and then be transcribed in full verbatim for analysis. All data will be anonymised during transcription.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, but your data cannot be withdrawn after August 2022.

**Why have you been invited to take part?**

You are being invited to take part in this study because you are: (1) aged over 18 years old; (2) a full-time Chinese international student studying at a UK University; (3) living in the UK for at least three months; (4) reasonably fluent in English (5.5 or above on IELTS); 5) have experienced loneliness, at least sometimes, during your stay in the UK.

You will be invited to attend a screening interview with Dr Xi Liu before the interview and the focus group to ensure that you are in an appropriate state of wellbeing. You are not eligible for this study if your state of wellbeing is identified as not appropriate for you to participate (e.g., experiencing a severe mental health problem, such as actively psychotic or in a manic episode)

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

Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantages or discomfort. However, some people may feel uncomfortable when discussing topics related to loneliness and mental health. We would like to reiterate that you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to during the interview/focus group, and you can withdraw your participation at any time without giving a reason.

If you attend the MBCT workshop, you will be invited to try a few mindfulness exercises. Brief mindfulness exercises are unlikely to cause adverse effects, but some people may feel discomfort while engaging in them. If you were upset by any of the exercises, you could just stop participating in the exercise or leave the workshop.

A member of the research team will be available to support you during the interview, the workshop and the focus group. You can also find a list of useful contacts below, which can be used to get more help if you want.

**How can I access support if I need it?**

You may wish to contact your GP to gain information about support or treatment that may be helpful to you locally. You can also contact the support services at your university.

If you need to talk to someone, you can contact Mind: 0300 123 3393. Mind is a mental health charity and they provide an information and signposting service. They are open 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday (except for bank holidays). You can also find a list of available support on their website ([here](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/crisis-services/helplines-listening-services/)).

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

You might benefit from learning about mindfulness/MBCT and engaging in the mindfulness exercises. it is hoped that this work will enhance our understanding of loneliness in CISs, and how MBCT could help. Results will be shared with mental health professionals working in UK universities in order to inform their work.

**What happens to the information in the project?**

All interview/focus group recordings and transcriptions will be encrypted and securely stored on OneDrive-University of Strathclyde. Any personally identifiable information will be removed from the transcript. Only members of the research team will have access to the recordings and transcriptions and any quotes used in reports/publications will not contain any information which could identify your personally. The recordings will be destroyed once the transcription has been checked for accuracy. Your personal data will be permanently deleted one year after the completion of this project, and anonymised transcripts will be deposited with the UK Data Service. You can request for your data to be withdrawn until August 2022.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner’s Office and processes all data in compliance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Please also read our [Privacy Notice for Research Participants](https://www.strath.ac.uk/media/ps/rkes/ethics/Privacy_Notice_Research_Participants_v0.8.docx).

Thank you for reading this information—if you are unsure of any information please feel free to ask any questions.

**What happens next?**

Thank you for your taking the time to read this information, even if you have chosen not to take part in this interview. If you would like to participate, please read and sign the Consent Form and we will then arrange the interview.

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Dr Xi Liu (Principal Investigator) Email: [x.liu.101@strath.ac.uk](mailto:x.liu.101@strath.ac.uk)

Yvonne Chin-Van Chau Email: [chinvan.chau@strath.ac.uk](mailto:chinvan.chau.2015@uni.strath.ac.uk)

Helin Zhao Email: [helin.zhao@strath.ac.uk](mailto:helin.zhao@strath.ac.uk)

Jifan Ren Email: [jifan.ren@strath.ac.uk](mailto:jifan.ren@strath.ac.uk)

Zhun Tang Email: zhun.tang21@imperial.ac.uk

The Co-Investigators of this study are: Dr Nicola Cogan, Dr Steve Kelly, Dr Susan Rasmussen; Dr Dwight Tse, & Dr Tony Anderson

This research was granted ethical approval by the School of Psychological Sciences and Health Ethics Committee at the University of Strathclyde.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the research, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

The School of Psychological Sciences and Health Ethics Committee

School of Psychological Sciences and Health

University of Strathclyde

Graham Hills Building

40 George Street

Glasgow

G1 1QE

Email: hass-psh-ethics@strath.ac.uk

**Consent Form**

**Name of department: School of Psychological Sciences and Health.**

**Title of the study: *Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and Loneliness in Chinese International Students***

* I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
* I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice for Participants in Research Projects and understand how my personal information will be used and what will happen to it (i.e. how it will be stored and for how long).
* I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to August 2022, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.
* I understand that I can request the withdrawal from the study of some personal information and that researchers will comply with my request until August 2022. This includes the following personal data:
  + audio recordings of interviews and focus groups that identify me;
  + my personal information from transcripts.
* I understand that anonymised data (i.e. data that do not identify me personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study.
* I understand that any information recorded in the research will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.
* I consent to the research team keeping my email address to receive results from the study
* I consent to being a participant in the project.
* I consent to being audio recorded as part of the project

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| --- | --- |
| (PRINT NAME) |  |
| Signature of Participant: | Date: |

**Debrief Sheet**

**Name of department: School of Psychological Sciences and Health.**

**Title of the study: *Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and Loneliness in Chinese International Students***

The current study

Thank you for taking part in this study. Chinese international students (CISs) in UK higher education represent the largest group of international students from a single country, and the challenges faced by CISs have become a topic of great concern among Higher Education Institutions. Loneliness has been identified as one of the main challenges that can affect CISs’ mental health and wellbeing. CISs have a high risk of being lonely, and this risk has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, compared to other international students, the Chinese ethnic group has been more targeted by prejudice and discrimination during the pandemic, which may lead to CISs’ increased difficulty in building a sense of belonging with the local community.

Cognitive training is effective in reducing loneliness in university students, but whether or how well the interventions developed in Western countries work for CISs has not been studied. CISs’ understanding of loneliness may differ from the western cultural understanding of the term, and it has been welldocumented that Chinese people generally prefer structured and directive types of intervention. Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), as a structured and directive group cognitive therapy with roots in Eastern traditions, is very likely to be beneficial for CISs. Using a participatory approach, this study aims to explore how CISs understand and experience loneliness, and how to culturally adapt MBCT for CISs’ loneliness.

Data collected

The data collected here will be used to write a report and we hope to publish this work in an academic journal. As mentioned in the information sheet, all data will be anonymised and we cannot withdraw your data after August 2022, due to you being completely unidentifiable.

Support Services

You may wish to contact your GP to gain information about support or treatment that may be helpful to you locally. You can also contact the support services at your university.

If you need to talk to someone, you can contact Mind: 0300 123 3393. Mind is a mental health charity and they provide an information and signposting service. They are open 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday (except for bank holidays). You can also find a list of available support on their website ([here](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/crisis-services/helplines-listening-services/)).

Further information

If you have any further questions regarding this study please contact the researchers.

Researcher Contact Details:

Dr Xi Liu (Principal Investigator) Email: [x.liu.101@strath.ac.uk](mailto:x.liu.101@strath.ac.uk)

Yvonne Chin-Van Chau Email: [chinvan.chau@strath.ac.uk](mailto:chinvan.chau.2015@uni.strath.ac.uk)

Helin Zhao Email: [helin.zhao@strath.ac.uk](mailto:helin.zhao@strath.ac.uk)

Jifan Ren Email: [jifan.ren@strath.ac.uk](mailto:jifan.ren@strath.ac.uk)

Zhun Tang Email: zhun.tang21@imperial.ac.uk

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