

Document date:19.02.2026

Study title: *Effects of darkness retreat*

Informed consent

NCT number: *Pending*

Informed Consent - Online Study Wave I

Dear Participants,

In the coming week, you will participate in a darkness retreat as part of a pilot study conducted by our research team. We are very excited about your participation and thank you for your commitment so far. Before we proceed to the main part of the experiment, we kindly ask you to complete a set of questionnaires aimed at measuring your psychological and emotional well-being and cognitive functioning in the stage preceding the experience. Completing the questionnaires is a condition for participating in the study. Please complete them today or no later than tomorrow by 12:00 PM, so that we can prepare for tomorrow's meeting.

What will today's stage of the study involve?

As previously announced, we will ask you to complete a set of questionnaires via an online form. These tools cover areas such as: emotions, psychological well-being, the presence of negative and positive thoughts, cognitive functioning, mindfulness, self-compassion, sense of meaning in life, as well as a subjective assessment of the intervention and potential side effects. The duration is approximately 40 minutes.

After completing the questionnaires below, please do not close the browser window, as you will be redirected to the next page, where we will ask you to perform a practical task.

What will be the consequences of today's stage of the study?

Filling out the questionnaires should not involve significant discomfort. Potential inconveniences may only arise from the fact that participation requires spending several dozen minutes in front of a computer, which may be tiring for some people. We encourage you to take a short break if you feel tired, step away from the computer for a moment, and return to the form after a short rest.

Data Confidentiality and Participant ID

Due to the longitudinal nature of the study (meaning data will be collected from you at three different times – today, on the day the study ends, and after 6 months), it is important to be able to link responses from different stages of the study while ensuring full data confidentiality. At this stage, each participant has been assigned an individual identification code created to protect personal data. This code was generated in a way that ensures anonymity while allowing for the linking of data from different stages of the study.

The code consists of the year of birth, the first two letters of the month of birth, and the last three digits of the PESEL number. For example: a person born in February 1987, whose PESEL ends in "111", will receive the code: 1987fe111 (for Polish speakers: 1987lu111). Please enter this code in the form confirming your willingness to participate in the study. This will allow us to link new responses with previous data without the need to process names, surnames, or other personal data.

What are my rights?

Your participation in the study is voluntary, and refusal does not involve any consequences. At any point in the study (including after it has started), you can withdraw from it without giving a reason. Since the study is completed online, selecting the option next to the sentence: "I declare that I have read the information for the study participant. Of my own free will, I agree to participate in this study. I express my clear and voluntary consent to the processing of my personal data by SWPS University with its registered office at ul. Chodakowska 19/31 in Warsaw (03-815) for the purpose of my participation in the study and for the needs of its objectives." is equivalent to us that you have read all the information about the study and agree to take part in it. In case of questions or doubts, at any stage of the study, as well as after its completion, please contact the person responsible for the project - Prof. Jarosław Michałowski or Dr. Katarzyna Sanna at jmichalowski@swps.edu.pl or ksanna@swps.edu.pl, to whom you can also report your desire to see the collective results of the project. After the data analysis is completed, participants will be able to receive a collective summary of the results and the main conclusions from the study, without individual data.

How will my data be protected?

All data you provide will be protected in accordance with legal regulations and ethical principles of conducting scientific research. Aside from team members trained in data protection, no one will have access to the information you provide. Signed informed consent documents will be kept with the highest safety standards, separate from research documentation (results). Immediately after the last stage of research, the research team will perform a full anonymization of the obtained results (any data enabling the identification of the participant will be removed), and contact details for people who took part in the study will be removed from our database. This also means that until the moment of anonymization, it will be possible to withdraw consent to participate in the study and withdraw your results; however, after this stage, we will only be able to withdraw your consent to participate in the study, which will be equivalent to the destruction of the informed consent form.

Who will be the Controller of my data?

The controller of personal data collected during the study is SWPS University with its registered office in Warsaw, ul. Chodakowska 19/31, 03-815 Warsaw (hereinafter: "SWPS University" or "controller"). You can contact the controller via email: swps@swps.pl, by phone at 22 517 96 00, or in writing to the controller's registered office address. The controller has appointed a Data Protection Officer (hereinafter: "DPO"), who can be contacted via email iod@swps.edu.pl or in writing to the controller's registered office address. The DPO can be contacted in all matters regarding the processing of personal data and the exercise of rights related to processing. Personal data will be processed for the purpose of: - conducting scientific research based on consent (Art. 6 sec. 1 lit. a GDPR); Personal data will be processed until the end of the scientific project, i.e., until June 2, 2026. Personal data may be shared with other entities only on the basis of legal regulations and to the extent indicated by them. The person whose data is processed has the right to request: access to data, rectification, deletion or restriction of processing, data portability, as well as the right to object to data processing. The Controller informs that in accordance with Art. 469b sec. 1 of the Act of July 20, 2018, Law on Higher Education and Science, the possibility of invoking the right to access data, the right to rectify them, the right to data portability, and the right to object is excluded if it is likely that these rights will prevent or seriously hinder the achievement of the objectives of scientific research and development work and if the exclusion of these rights is necessary to achieve the indicated scientific and development goals.

The person whose data is processed has the right to lodge a complaint with the supervisory authority dealing with the protection of personal data (President of the Office for Personal Data Protection). Providing personal data is voluntary but necessary to participate in the scientific study. The controller will not make automated decisions, including profiling, based on the collected personal data.

I declare that I have read the information for the study participant. Of my own free will, I agree to participate in this study. I express my clear and voluntary consent to the processing of my personal data by SWPS University with its registered office at ul. Chodakowska 19/31 in Warsaw (03-815) for the purpose of my participation in the study and for the needs of its objectives.

Informed Consent - Low Monitoring Group

Note: The Informed Consent for participants in the high monitoring group is identical, with the only difference being the information regarding the frequency of monitoring.

Dear Participants,

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the practice of retreats as a method that positively impacts well-being. Such a retreat can, for example, take the form of staying alone in an isolated room with the lights on or off (in darkness). We would like to invite you to participate in a scientific study, as part of which you will take part in a 5-day darkness retreat experience, conducted by employees of SWPS University at the Faculty of Psychology and Law in Poznań in cooperation with Within – The Ultimate Darkness Retreat in Wróblewo.

As part of this study, you will spend 3 days in seclusion (from Tuesday morning until Friday morning).

What will the study involve?

At this stage, you already know that you have been assigned to one of two research groups. After reading and signing the Informed Consent below, you will spend tonight's trial night in a darkness cabin; however, during this trial stay, you will be able to use lighting. Before entering the cabin, you will be given a tour of it.

The cabins contain a bed, a toilet, a shower, and a dining area. The person undergoing the retreat stays in the cabin in total darkness at all times, which means that all daily activities take place without light. During the retreat, there is no access to mobile phones, laptops, or watches, and meals are provided without contact with outsiders. Participants can turn on the light at any time; they can also leave and return to the darkness if they feel they need to. A description of the safety solutions for persons staying in the cabin can be found in Appendix 1 of this document. Please read it carefully and sign it. If you need to discuss the safety solutions in the cabin again before spending the first night in it, the team caring for you during the study will be happy to answer all your questions.

After signing the Informed Consent document, we will ask you to fill out a short questionnaire. This will be followed by a brief mindfulness training session. This training is intended to help prepare for the retreat – it facilitates calming down, better contact with one's own thoughts and emotions, and a safer experience of staying in the dark. Then, participants will travel by car to the cabin, where a team member will show its equipment and discuss the rules for using the devices located there. After a short

orientation and unpacking, participants return to the main House at a set time for dinner. After dinner, all participants will return to their cabins, where they will spend the trial night.

After the night spent in seclusion, you will leave the cabin and return to the main House at a set time for breakfast and a meeting with a psychologist, where you will be able to share your impressions regarding the night in the darkness cabin and confirm or withdraw from further participation in the study. If you decide to continue participating, you will go to the darkness cabin again on the same day and spend 3 nights in it (entry into the cabin will take place before noon). As we wrote earlier, you will stay in the cabin in total darkness, without access to natural or artificial light. Such a state may be associated with various experiences – some may be pleasant, while others may cause discomfort. The cabins in which you will stay are not locked. The person inside has the option to leave the cabin and the building at any time – the door opens from the inside simply by pressing the handle. From the outside, the doors are self-latching and can only be opened by staff using a key, ensuring privacy and safety. If necessary, just as during the training night, you can turn on the light at any time; you can also leave and return to the darkness if you feel you need to.

At any time, you can also contact the psychologist or security using the intercom located in the cabin. Thanks to this, you have constant access to help and can feel safe throughout the duration of the retreat. At any point in the study, you will also be able to withdraw from it without giving a reason.

During the retreat, regular meetings with a psychologist will take place once a day. During these meetings, the psychologist will be in the vestibule of the cabin and talk to you through the door, asking questions about your well-being in the cabin and the general course of the experience. The consultation – depending on the participant's needs and readiness – may last up to about 30 minutes or longer if such a need arises. Additionally, all conversations with the psychologist will be recorded in audio form, solely for research purposes.

After the experience is over, on the morning of leaving the cabin, a Study Caretaker will come for you to help you safely leave the cabin. The cabins are exited wearing special eye bands – this is to allow the participant to gradually emerge from the darkness at their own pace and to protect the eyes from sudden contact with light, which may initially be unpleasant or too intense. On-site, near the cabin, a conversation with a psychologist will take place regarding the first impressions after finishing the retreat. This conversation will be audio-recorded to preserve the experiences and ensure the consistency of the procedure. Then, the participant proceeds on foot to the main House, where they will be able to eat a meal and have a warm drink.

On-site, we will ask you to complete: (1) a computer-based test (duration about 20 minutes), (2) re-complete the same questionnaires that were sent before arriving in Wróblewo (about 40 minutes), (3) and two short questionnaires in paper form (about 10 minutes).

Six months after the completion of this study, we will invite you again to complete the same set of questionnaires you filled out the day before arriving in Wróblewo, as well as a computer-based test. These tools will cover areas such as: emotions, psychological well-being, the presence of negative and positive thoughts, cognitive functioning, mindfulness, self-compassion, sense of meaning in life, as well as a subjective assessment of the intervention and potential side effects. Also at this stage, we will ask

you to perform a short concentration test. The study will last 60 minutes. Participation in the study will consist solely of independently filling out an online form at a time convenient for you.

Finally – we would like to kindly ask you to maintain discretion regarding your participation in the study. Please do not share detailed information about its course with people who may yet apply for participation. Knowledge of this information could influence their experiences and thus reduce the reliability of the results obtained.

During participation in the study, each person will receive a WHOOP monitoring band. This is a modern, safe device worn on the wrist that records basic physiological parameters such as: circadian rhythm, heart rate, sleep quality, and physical activity level. This allows us to better understand how the body reacts to retreat conditions and ensure your safety during the experiment. The bands will also be specially covered so as not to emit any light.

During the stay at the center, conversations with the psychologist – including:

- the conversation after arrival and welcome on-site,
- the conversation after the trial night in the cabin,
- short monitoring conversations during the stay,
- and the conversation after leaving the cabin – will be recorded using a voice recorder.

The audio recording will be marked with an individual code, password-protected, and available only to authorized research team members: Prof. Jarosław Michałowski, Dr. Katarzyna Sanna, and research assistant Jakub Szewdo. After the project is completed, all recordings will be permanently deleted in accordance with personal data protection principles.

Will I receive help if participating in the study is emotionally difficult for me?

If during the study you experience strong psychological discomfort or feel the need to talk to a specialist, you will be able to use a free consultation with a psychiatrist and a psychologist.

The psychological state of participants will be monitored by the research team. If any concerning signals are observed, team members will engage in a conversation with the participant and – with their consent – propose contact with a specialist (psychiatrist).

Our experience indicates that this is unlikely, but if serious concerns about your safety or well-being arise, the team may – without obtaining prior consent – contact a specialist (psychiatrist) to obtain help in providing appropriate support.

If, after completing your participation in the study, while already at home, you feel persistent psychological discomfort, it will also be possible to use a free consultation with a specialist (psychiatrist or psychologist). Each participant will be able to use up to three such consultations, which will be paid for in full by the study organizers. On the day your stay ends, you will receive an email from us with contact details for the available specialists.

Will I receive compensation for participating in the study?

If you decide to start the main stage of the study – i.e., enter the darkness cabin for a four-day retreat – you will receive compensation in the amount of 900 PLN in the form of shopping vouchers. This amount is due regardless of whether you remain in the cabin for the entire planned time or decide to end your participation early. The compensation applies only to participation in the main stage of the study and does not include the training night preceding the retreat.

For completing the questionnaires at the follow-up stage (i.e., six months after the end of the retreat), you will receive compensation in the form of shopping vouchers in the amount of 400 PLN.

What are my rights?

Your participation in the study is voluntary, and refusal does not involve any consequences. At any point in the study (including after it has started), you can withdraw from it without giving a reason.

In case of questions or doubts, at any stage of the study, as well as after its completion, please contact the person responsible for the project – Prof. Jarosław Michałowski or Dr. Katarzyna Sanna at jmichalowski@swps.edu.pl or ksanna@swps.edu.pl, to whom you can also report your desire to see the collective results of the project. After the data analysis is completed, participants will be able to receive a collective summary of the results and the main study conclusions, without individual data.

How will my data be protected?

All data you provide will be protected in accordance with legal regulations and ethical principles of conducting scientific research. Aside from team members trained in data protection, no one will have access to the information you provide. Signed informed consent documents will be kept with the highest safety standards, separate from research documentation (questionnaire results and concentration tests). Additionally, due to the longitudinal nature of the study (meaning we will collect data from you three times), all data enabling identification will be encrypted by creating an individual pseudonym. This pseudonym will be shared only with you and will consist of your year of birth, the first two letters of the month in which you were born, and the last three digits of your PESEL number (e.g., 1987fe111).

Audio recordings of conversations with the psychologist will be transcribed, i.e., written down in written form. They will then be anonymized – this means that all information that could allow the identification of the participant (e.g., name, profession, place of residence) will be removed or changed in the texts. Thanks to this, your statements will remain completely confidential, and the data will not be linkable to a specific person.

Immediately after the last stage of research, the research team will perform a full anonymization of the obtained results (any data enabling the identification of the participant will be removed), and contact details for people who took part in the study will be removed from our database. This also means that until the moment of anonymization, it will be possible to withdraw consent to participate in the study and withdraw your results; however, after this stage, we will only be able to withdraw your consent to participate in the study, which will be equivalent to the destruction of the informed consent form.

In the interest of the participants' well-being, the study procedure was submitted for evaluation by the Commission for Ethics in Empirical Research Involving Human Participants at SWPS University and received approval (No. 2025 - 288).

Who will be the Controller of my data?

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Personal data will be processed for the purpose of: conducting scientific research based on consent (Art. 6 sec. 1 lit. a GDPR). Personal data will be processed until the end of the scientific project, i.e., until June 2, 2026.

Personal data may be shared with other entities only on the basis of legal regulations and to the extent indicated by them.

The person whose data is processed has the right to request: access to data, rectification, deletion or restriction of processing, data portability, as well as the right to object to data processing.

The Controller informs that in accordance with Art. 469b sec. 1 of the Act of July 20, 2018, Law on Higher Education and Science, the possibility of invoking the right to access data, the right to rectify them, the right to data portability, and the right to object is excluded if it is likely that these rights will prevent or seriously hinder the achievement of the objectives of scientific research and development work and if the exclusion of these rights is necessary to achieve the indicated scientific and development goals.

The person whose data is processed has the right to lodge a complaint with the supervisory authority dealing with the protection of personal data (President of the Office for Personal Data Protection). Providing personal data is voluntary but necessary to participate in the scientific study.

The controller will not make automated decisions, including profiling, based on the collected personal data.

Consent for participation in the main study in Wróblewo

I declare that I have read the information for the study participant. Of my own free will, I agree to participate in this study. I express my clear and voluntary consent to the processing of my personal data by SWPS University with its registered office at ul. Chodakowska 19/31 in Warsaw (03-815) for the purpose of my participation in the study and for the needs of its objectives.

Date and place:

Name and surname of the participant:

Name and surname of the researcher: