

Participant Information Sheet – Stage 1

Date that data collection will start:

01 September 2025

Project Title

Faith, Food, and the Female Body: A Study of New Zealand Churches.

Greetings, Kia ora, Talofa,

You are invited to participate in a research study on the impact of diet culture on women who belong to Protestant Christian churches in New Zealand. This study is being conducted by Jennifer Bowden from the Auckland University of Technology and Laidlaw (Theological) College, New Zealand. Other research team members include Rev. Dr Maja Whitaker and Rev. Dr Sarah Penwarden from Laidlaw College. The study is being carried out as a requirement for a PhD.

What is the purpose of this research?

In New Zealand, many of us have grown up with strong messages about body size, health, and what we eat. These messages often suggest that being thin means you're healthy, in control, and even a better person. These types of beliefs (called "diet culture" by researchers) can affect people's wellbeing in many ways, including their mental, physical, spiritual, and social health. It can also lead to unfair treatment, especially for women and people from ethnic minority groups.

This research examines the beliefs of diet culture, contrasts them with biblical teachings, and explores how women experience the pressures of diet culture, particularly within Protestant Christian churches. The goal is to find a helpful and biblically grounded way for Christian communities to respond to diet culture and support women's overall health and wellbeing. The findings of this research will be published in a thesis and may also be used for other academic publications and presentations.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

We are looking for New Zealand-born European, Māori and Polynesian women aged 18-59 years who belong to Protestant Christian churches (of any denomination) in New Zealand to participate in this research. You will have received this Participant Information Sheet if you responded to one of our online or print advertising flyers seeking to recruit women for this research. These flyers are being distributed through participating churches, universities and other Christian faith-based networks in New Zealand.

Unfortunately, you won't be able to take part in this research if any of the following apply to you:

- You have a history of a diagnosed eating disorder.
- You have a medical condition that affects eating or body weight (such as diabetes, coeliac disease, or Crohn's disease).
- You work or have trained in nutrition or dietetics.

These criteria are in place to ensure the research is safe for participants and to help keep the focus on the research aims.

If you're unsure whether you're eligible, feel free to contact the researcher for a quick and confidential chat.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you want to participate in this research, you can email the lead researcher, Jennifer Bowden (email: jennifer.bowden@autuni.ac.nz) for more information and a copy of the Consent Form that explains your

rights regarding consent. It is your choice if you choose to participate in this research (it is voluntary), and whether you participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you.


You can withdraw from the study at any time by informing the Researcher. If you do withdraw, you can choose to have any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allow it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, it may not be possible to remove your data.

What will my participation involve?

This research project has two stages. If you choose to take part, you will begin with **Stage 1**, which is the main part of the study and is required for all participants.

Stage 2 is optional. After completing Stage 1, you will receive a separate invitation to take part in Stage 2's Focus Group sessions. At that point, you can decide whether or not you'd like to be involved—there's no obligation.

Below is a brief outline of what is involved in Stage 1, for your information:



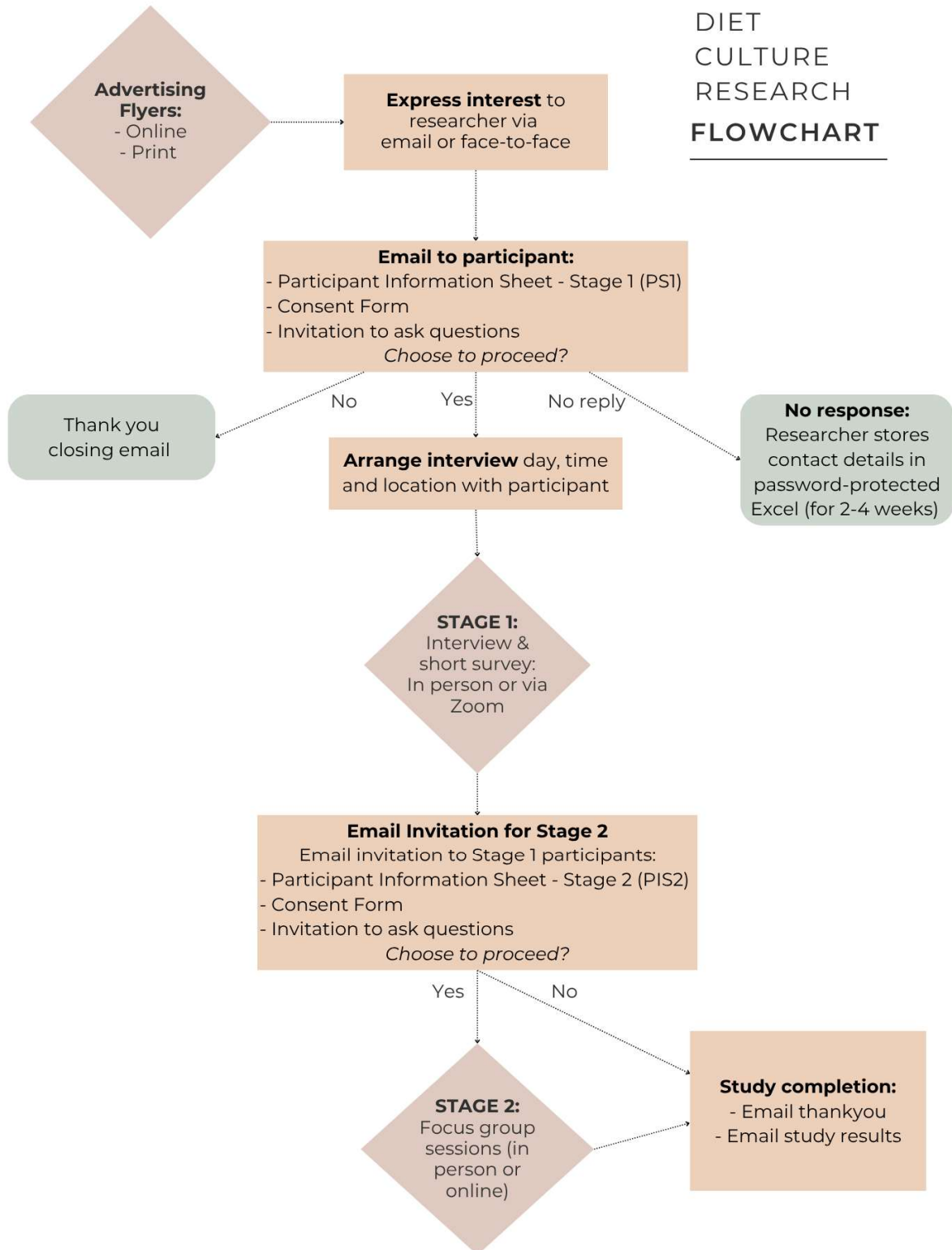
Stage 1 - One-on-One Interviews/Talanoa & Survey

The first stage involves a one-on-one session, which includes firstly, a brief questionnaire we complete together, followed by an interview. The questionnaire consists of general demographic questions about you (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, education level, church denomination, church attendance, etc) and a series of questions about your thoughts and feelings related to your body and appearance. The interview will also explore your personal experiences and beliefs about food, body image, and dieting. There are no right or wrong answers – we just want to hear your thoughts and experiences. This one-on-one session can be conducted in person at a campus meeting room or online via Teams/Zoom (if you prefer).

Duration: 45-60 minutes.

On the following page is a flow chart that explains the different stages. Participants complete Stage 1: Interview (one-on-one discussion) and the short questionnaire, which is the main part of the project. They are then invited later to participate in the optional Stage 2 - Focus Groups. There is no obligation to participate in this second stage, see the flow chart overleaf:

DIET CULTURE RESEARCH FLOWCHART



Consent Forms

To safeguard you as a potential participant and for research purposes, a Consent Form is provided for Stage 1 (a separate Information Sheet and Consent Form are used for Stage 2). The Consent Form for

Stage 1 will be provided via email before the meeting time. You will need to approve and give your consent for Stage 1's one-on-one interview and questionnaire.

What are the benefits?

Participation in this research may provide an opportunity for reflection and validation of your experiences, particularly as women's lived experiences of body image, faith and health are under-represented in discussions, particularly in medical discussions about health.

The research will contribute to the researcher's PhD and support her development of a biblically grounded, holistic response to diet culture for Christian communities and her ongoing work within these communities.

The research may also inform better practices in church teaching, pastoral care, and Christian health practices, providing a more supportive and inclusive environment that better supports body image and wellbeing for women.

What are the costs?

Participating in the one-on-one interview and questionnaire may take around 45-60 minutes. Travel time will be added to this. However, onsite parking will be provided for you to attend this session. In appreciation for your participation in the one-on-one interviews a koha of a \$30 Prezzy card will be provided to each participant.

Will the results of the study be published?

The results of this research will be published in a Doctoral thesis. The thesis will be available to the general public through the AUT library. Results may be published in peer-reviewed academic journals. Results will also be presented at conferences or seminars to a wider professional and academic community. You will not be identifiable in any of these publications.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Taking part in this study may involve some risks; we want you to be aware of these, so we are highlighting them here upfront:

- Emotional impact – there exists a risk of the discussion topics triggering an emotional response such as stress, confusion, depression, sadness, or triggering past emotional experiences.
- Tiredness – taking part in the interviews or focus groups might result in low energy levels.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

If you feel discomfort during any of the stages of this research, you can withdraw your participation. You can also choose not to answer specific questions or participate in discussion topics during the one-on-one interviews. Also, if I (the researcher) notice that you look uncomfortable during a session, I will pause my questions and check on your wellbeing and whether you wish to continue.

AUT Student Counselling and Mental Health can offer three free sessions of confidential counselling support for adult participants in an AUT research project. These sessions are only available for issues that have arisen directly as a result of participation in the research and are not for other general counselling needs. To access these services, you will need to:

- Drop into our centre at WB203 City Campus, email counselling@aut.ac.nz or call (09) 921 9292.
- Let the receptionist know that you are a research participant and provide the title of my research and my name and contact details as given in this Information Sheet.

You can find out more information about AUT counsellors and counselling on <https://www.aut.ac.nz/student-life/student-support/counselling-and-mental-health>

What will happen to information about me?

During the research, we will collect identifiable information about you, including your name and email address, as well as voice recordings. This data is:

Privacy Protected - All information collected will be stored securely on a computer (password-protected) at Laidlaw College and backed up to a password-protected OneDrive for six years. The

information answered for the questionnaire is also stored securely by the Qualtrics Survey platform. You will be given a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality for the one-on-one interviews. Only the researcher and supervisors will have access to the document that links your pseudonym to your name. Signed Consent Forms will be stored in a locked cabinet at Laidlaw College for six years.

Recorded - During the one-on-one interviews I will record the session on a Zoom/Teams Meeting app and an audio recorder, as well as take notes with a pen and paper. This is highlighted in the Consent Form for you to sign off before we start. Only the Researcher and the Research Supervisors will have access to the audio recordings.

Transcribed – The audio recordings from one-on-one interviews will be transcribed afterwards. Pseudonyms will be used in these transcripts. You can choose to receive a copy of your transcript to verify and sign off as an accurate account of our time together before I continue using your transcript for data research.

Consent - By signing the Consent Form the participant is agreeing to the use of their information as stated in this Participant Information Sheet for this research project only. Any information that identifies the participant will only be disclosed outside of the study with the participant's permission, or as required by law.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You will have two weeks to consider this invitation and decide whether you wish to participate or not. All potential participants will be kept on the database for up to one month, a reasonable timeframe to allow them the opportunity to consider their involvement in this study.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

A summary of the research will be available to all participants at the end of the study. If you would like a copy of this, please tick the box requesting a research summary on your Consent Form.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor:

Rev. Dr. Maja Whitaker, mwhitaker@laidlaw.ac.nz, (+643) 354 4270.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTC:

ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Who do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Participant Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Jennifer Bowden, email: jennifer.bowden@autuni.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Rev. Dr. Maja Whitaker, mwhitaker@laidlaw.ac.nz

Rev. Dr. Sarah Penwarden, spenwarden@laidlaw.ac.nz

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 19th August 2025, AUTC
Reference number: 25/231.**