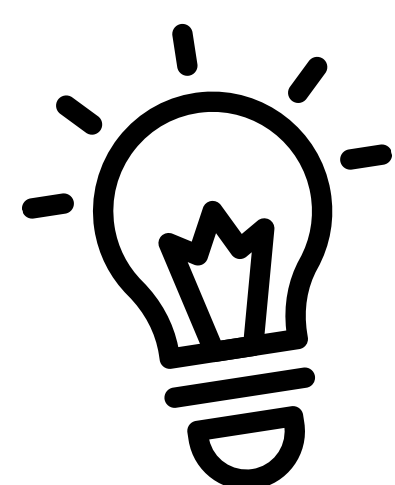


# The daily life experiences of UCC doctoral students and how the “Everyday Matters: Healthy Habits for University Life” digital badge impacts daily life and well-being

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## Background

Increasing the number of doctoral students are priorities nationally and internationally. A large and growing amount of literature has reported a decrease in the mental health and well-being of doctoral students (Byrom et al., 2020; Woolston, 2019). Their experience is typically characterised by a long and demanding academic and personal journey. Daily activities and routines are important to health and well-being. However, little is currently known about the daily life experiences and well-being of doctoral students in Ireland and beyond.

“Everyday Matters: Healthy Habits for University Life” (EMDB) is a time-use and well-being intervention offered to doctoral students as a co-curricular digital badge microcredential at University College Cork (UCC). Over the 8-session self-paced online course, students learn about brain and body health, and how to create and maintain daily habits and routines that support physical and emotional well-being for learning and life (Hunt & Coombes, 2021).



## Research Questions

What are the daily life experiences of doctoral students, and how does this impact well-being and balance of daily activities?

How did participation in the “Everyday Matters: Healthy Habits for University Life” (EMDB) digital badge impact the participants’ daily life and well-being?



## Research Design

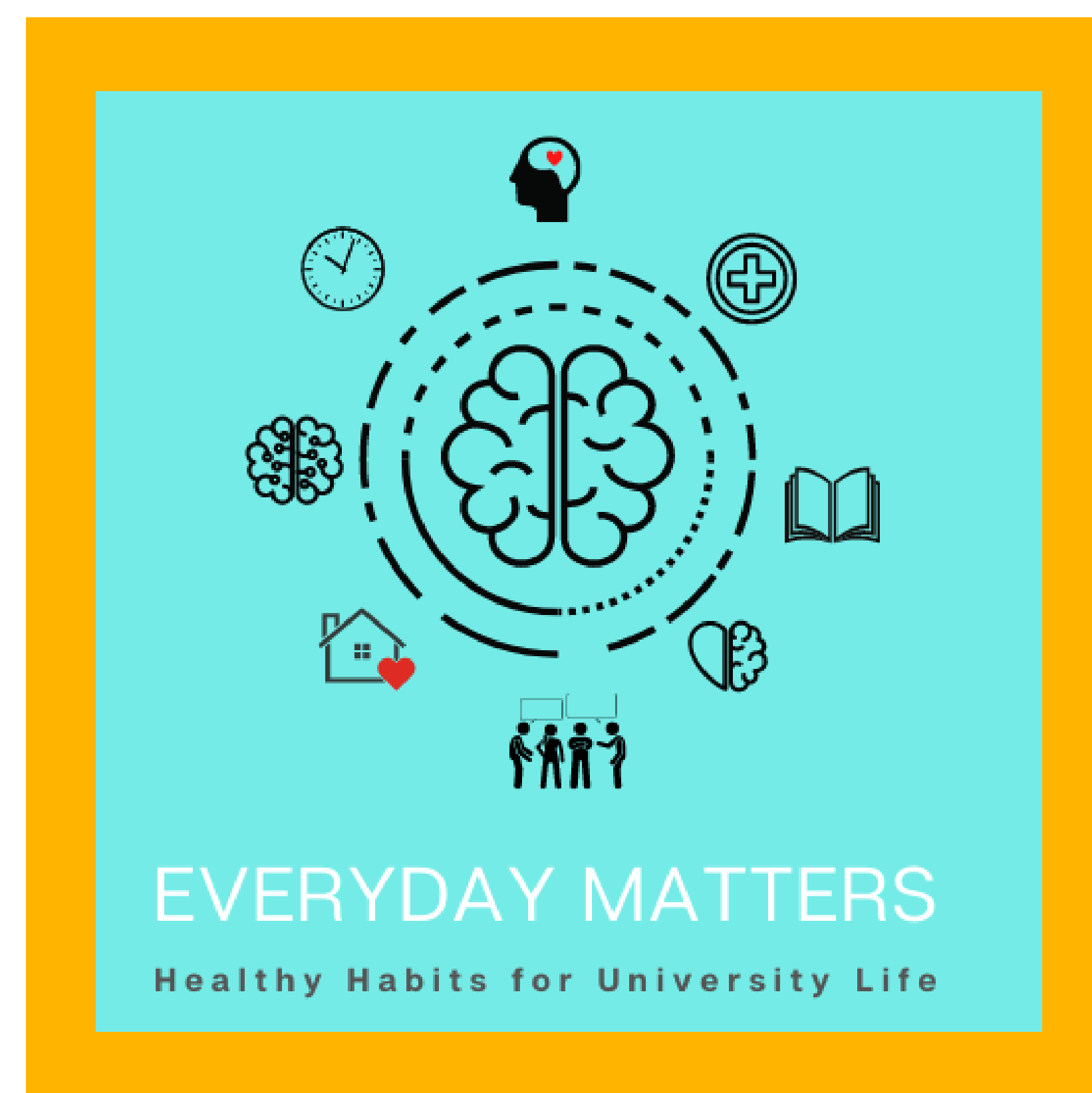
Ethical approval was granted in 2022

A qualitative interpretive descriptive study

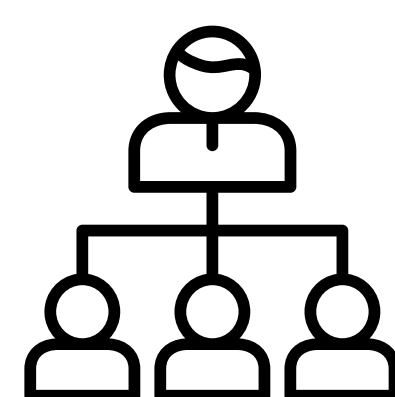
Participants = 10 UCC doctoral students

Individual semi-structured interviews

Thematic analysis completed



## Findings



I am more than just a doctoral student

Doctoral students prioritise their degree and have a wide range of activities and routines to complete their work. Other roles include being family members; a partner/spouse, a son/daughter, a sibling or parent. Students are also friends and colleagues and some have paid employment roles to consider. The daily lives of students are full of tending to these roles and activities that are associated with their responsibilities.



Doctoral degrees are all-consuming

Students value their time away from their degree to engage in exercise and nature, meeting others, or in their hobbies. Many students were unhappy with how they spent their time each day, where their degree took up the majority of their time. They felt that it was difficult to balance all the things they needed to do with what they wanted to do, often resulting in them experiencing a lack of time for themselves.



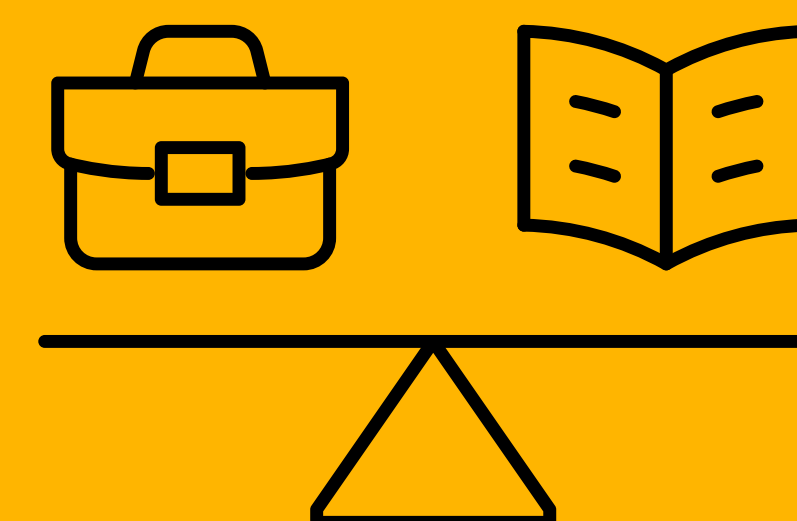
Doctoral degrees can have a positive and negative impact on well-being

Students discussed the positive impacts the degree has had on their well-being citing that they are passionate about the degree and it gives them purpose and motivation as well as opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills and connect with others. Negative impacts on well-being were also discussed such as experiencing imposter syndrome, anxiety, and stress. Some also spoke about the negative impact the degree has had on their physical health and sleep.



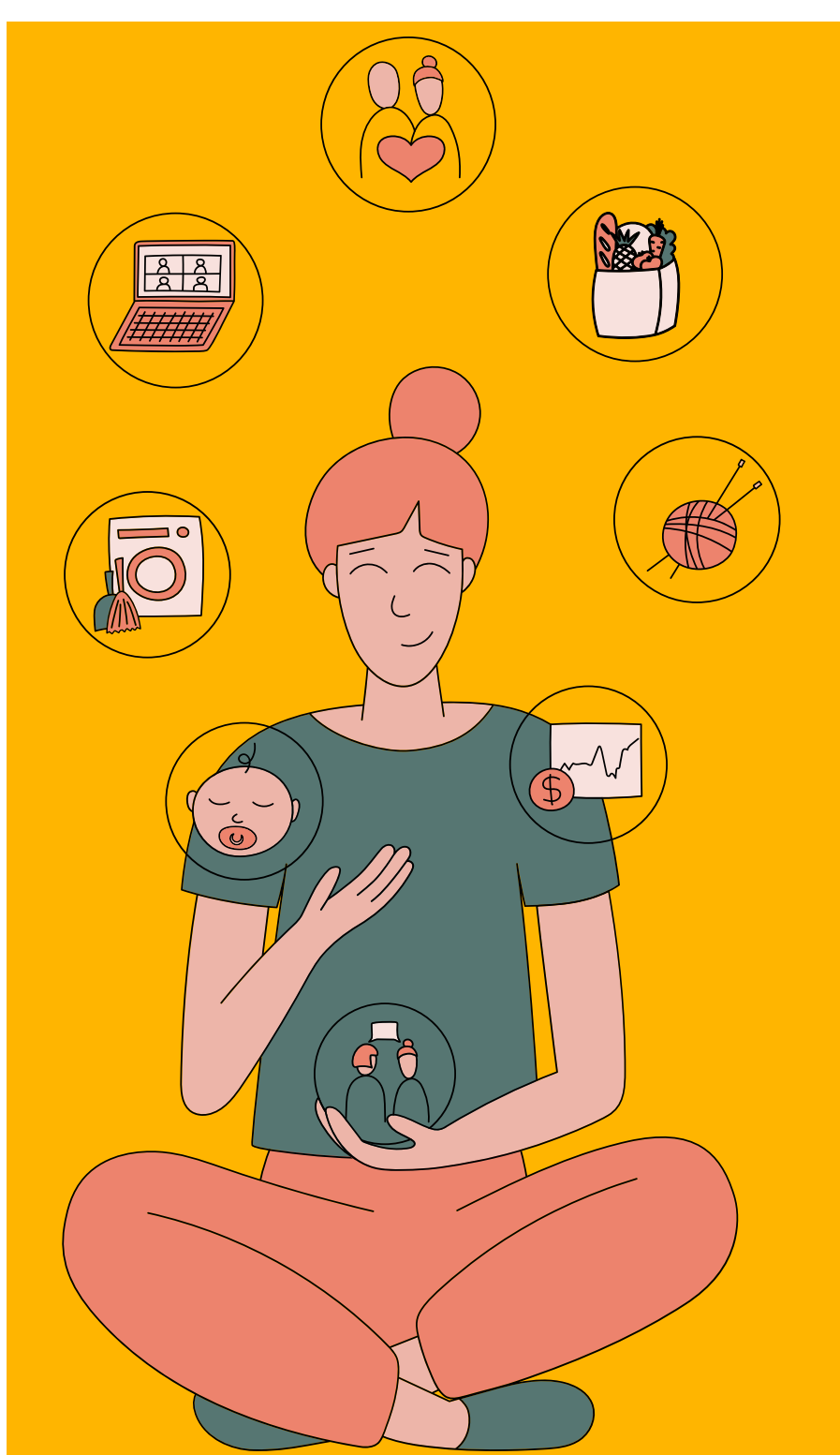
Everyday does matter

Students spoke about how they engaged with the EMDB and found the EMDB to be an enjoyable programme that they would recommend to other doctoral students. They discussed the range of benefits they experienced from the digital badge such as it serving as a reminder to put themselves first, prioritise their well-being and work towards a better balance in their life.



## Implications

- This study provides a deeper insight into the daily life experiences of doctoral students which is helpful for educators, research supervisors, professional services staff and healthcare professionals
- Poor mental health and well-being can have devastating impacts on the personal and academic lives of doctoral students
- It is essential that organisational and governmental policies address the well-being of doctoral students specifically
- More programmes should be put in place for doctoral students to support their mental health and well-being



## Conclusion

Obtaining an insight into the daily lives of doctoral students is essential in order to try and understand the reality of students in their educational environment. Doctoral students have a range of roles and responsibilities and subsequent activities that they need to and want to engage in on a daily basis. Balancing their daily activities and roles is difficult while doing a doctoral degree. The doctoral degree can have both a positive and negative impact on well-being. Furthermore, supporting the mental health and well-being of doctoral students through interventions or programmes is essential to assist them in successfully completing their degree. The EMDB is an effective digital badge to support the daily lives and well-being of doctoral students.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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