

Is stuttering linked to social anxiety?

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The differences – and similarities – between people with high levels of social anxiety and stutterers are being investigated by researchers at Flinders.

In the hope of find new methods of overcoming, treat and even prevent stuttering, the researchers will study whether high [anxiety](#) impacts a stutterer's rate of recovery and possible treatment relapse.

They will also examine differences in cognitive processes such as fears of criticism and fears of negative evaluation.

Research focusing on psychological aspects of stuttering is the specialisation of Alan Webb, currently doing his Psychology Honours research with Dr. Junwen Chen, senior lecturer in Psychology – and to continue this research they are now looking to recruit [adults](#) who stutter.

To investigate different features of [social anxiety](#) in people who stutter, they will be assessing levels of Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), an intense fear of scrutiny by others in [social situations](#) than can lead to people avoiding social situations.

Individuals who stutter have a much higher risk of developing SAD than the general population due to bullying and negative peer responses that often begin in childhood, and it has been suggested that social anxiety increases the risk of relapse for adults who stutter following speech treatment due to situation avoidance.

To ensure that treatment approaches are relevant and effective for adults who stutter with SAD, Mr Webb says it is important to understand the factors that contribute to and maintain SAD in adults who stutter.

"The aim of this study is to investigate if the negative beliefs and biased cognitive processing seen in non-stuttering populations with SAD would contribute to and maintain social anxiety in adults who [stutter](#)," he says.

"According to the cognitive behavioural models of SAD, fear of negative and positive evaluation are core beliefs experienced by socially anxious individuals."

Initial research has been performed, but the Flinders team is making a call for further public participants in this study, which will continue throughout this year. To register your interest in participating in this study, please email emotionandbehaviourlab@hotmail.com

This work complements other work being done at Flinders University to build greater knowledge about stuttering.

Dr. Michelle Swift, lecturer and clinical educator in fluency disorders for the Flinders University Speech Pathology program, is currently writing an ethics application to investigate potential treatments for the psychosocial issues that can accompany school-aged stuttering. She will be calling for volunteers for this project towards the end of this year.

Provided by Flinders University

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