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Overcome your spider fears on the world wide web

If you fear spiders, then the University of Tasmania needs you.

Researchers are looking for volunteers to participate in a new study into spider fear and receive a free trial treatment for their phobia.

'Feardrop' is an online phobia treatment system developed by academics Professor Ken Kirkby, Dr Allison Matthews and Dr Joel Scanlan and one of a few programs to directly deliver exposure treatment online.

Statistics show approximately 5-10 per cent of the adult population experience some form of specific phobia, with higher rates found among females than males.

The current research is being conducted by Liselot Goudswaard, a University of Tasmania Master's student in Clinical Psychology, who said the program was an easily accessible way for people to access assistance for their spider phobia.

"When people are confronted by the feared object or situation they can feel extremely anxious and can experience a panic attack which can have significant, unwanted effects on their everyday life," she said.

"Unfortunately, many people with phobias do not seek treatment due to accessibility, cost and duration, which is why online treatment could be a helpful solution."

'Feardrop' is designed to help people overcome their fears through a common psychological technique known as graded exposure.

"The goal of exposure therapy is to expose the individual to the feared object gradually until they experience a reduction in fear through the process of habituation," Ms Goudswaard.

Ms Goudswaard said the online treatment could help people to reduce their fear of spiders in everyday life and may act as a stepping stone for real life exposure.

“We are conducting this research trial to assess the effectiveness of the treatment and to work out the best way to present the images to achieve the maximum benefit for our participants,” she said.

“It is also hoped that by investigating individuals’ varying responses to treatment and contributing factors, we will be able to tailor exposure treatment to the individual based on their needs,” she said.

Volunteers who are interested in participating can register online at www.feardrop.com to begin the trial treatment, or email contact@feardrop.com

Researchers also have an online program available for OCD symptoms at www.ocddrop.com

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