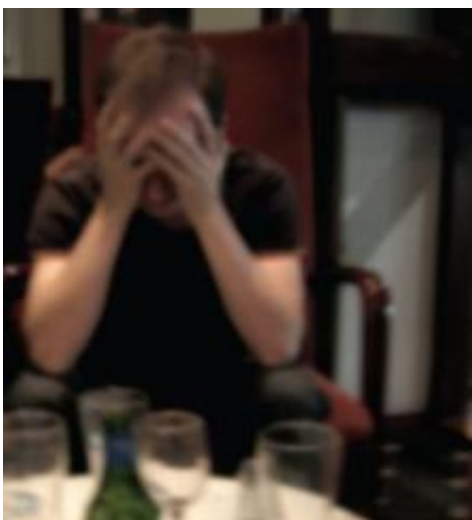


## Researchers pioneer new treatment for social phobia and alcohol abuse

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(PhysOrg.com) -- For many people, drinking is an essential part of a night out with friends. Alcohol is widely considered to be a social lubricant, so it's not surprising that social phobia, or extreme shyness, and drinking, frequently go together.

More concerning are reports of increased [alcohol problems](#) among socially anxious people. Research studies tell us that people who suffer from social phobia are 2-3 times more likely to develop problems with alcohol abuse and/or alcohol dependence.

Yet historically, alcohol dependency and [social anxiety](#) have been treated as separate problems. Now, with greater understanding about how the two interact, researchers from Macquarie University's Centre for Emotional Health have developed a new treatment for adults that addresses both problems together.

Dr Lexine Stapinski, from the University's Centre for Emotional Health who is coordinating the new program, said many people mistakenly believe that alcohol relaxes them when in fact, excessive drinking actually increases agitation and anxiety.

“Alcohol use and social anxiety tend to feed each other in a vicious cycle,” she said.

“Shy people believe alcohol helps them to steady their nerves and feel more confident, but this can lead to a reliance on alcohol and ultimately a range of additional physical, social and emotional problems.”

Stapinski notes that 10.6 per cent of Australians have problems with social phobia while 18.9 per cent of the population drink alcohol at harmful levels, according to the most recent ABS National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing.

Now with changes to recommended drinking levels set in the 2009 National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines at no more than two drinks per day, the number of those considered to be drinking at harmful levels will increase.

The new program developed by researchers at Macquarie offers participants 10 individual [cognitive behavioural therapy](#) sessions at no cost. Medication is also offered as an option. Treatment sessions are conducted with experienced clinical psychologists and are based on the most up-to-date research findings and knowledge of social anxiety and

[alcohol dependence](#).

More information about the study and treatment can be found at [www.psy.mq.edu.au/casp/](http://www.psy.mq.edu.au/casp/) .

Provided by Macquarie University

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