

Evaluation of an online cognitive-behavioural treatment programme for social anxiety for higher education students: the Participate programme.

Submission date 24/11/2015	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	☐ Prospectively registered
		☐ Protocol
Registration date 03/12/2015	Overall study status Completed	☐ Statistical analysis plan
		☐ Results
Last Edited 03/12/2015	Condition category Mental and Behavioural Disorders	☐ Individual participant data
		☐ Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and Study Aims

Social anxiety describes a condition where someone is fearful of social situations. It is one of the most common types of psychological difficulty that people can face. The problem affects a significant number of higher-education students and it can cause them to struggle to progress academically or to succeed in a career. Social anxiety may also lead to isolation, depression and substance misuse. Research suggests that one-to-one cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) with a trained practitioner is the best treatment for social anxiety. However, there are not enough CBT therapists to treat the large numbers of students having difficulties, and, in any case, it is too expensive to do so. The aim of this study then is to test an online programme based on cognitive-behavioural therapy. The effect of the programme is measured by assessing the severity of social anxiety experienced by the participants before and after the treatment.

Who can participate?

Adult higher-education students suffering from social anxiety.

What does the study involve?

All students in participating higher-education institutions are sent an email with a link to a website where they can register to look at an introductory module that explains the CBT model of social anxiety, what the programme involves and how to apply. The application process involves consenting to take part in the research and completing questionnaires to assess social anxiety and depression. Applicants who meet the criteria for the research are then allocated randomly to one of three groups. One group can start the programme immediately, and have a personal supporter (a trained psychology graduate), who contacts the student every week with feedback on their progress. A second group undertake the online programme without a personal supporter, and a third group are allocated to the supported version of the programme, but have to wait for 3 months before they can begin. The online CBT programme, called Participate, consists of 5 essential and 1 optional module. Modules consist of text, videos, exercises and logs in which to record work. The modules help the participants to learn about the

thoughts and behaviours that maintain social anxiety, and how to change those thoughts and behaviours, so as to build confidence and overcome the condition. At the end of an 8-week period social anxiety and depression are assessed again for participants in each of the 3 groups.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

Benefits of participating include a better understanding of social anxiety, a reduction in anxiety about social situations and increased participation in social and work-related activities. Potential risks of participating are insignificant, however some temporary increases in anxious feelings, while thinking about or engaging in social activities, may be experienced.

Where is the study run from?

1. School of Psychology, National University of Ireland, Galway (Ireland)
2. Dublin Institute of Technology, Aungier Street, Dublin (Ireland)
3. University of West Scotland, Hamilton (Scotland)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?

June 2014 to September 2016

Who is funding the study?

National University of Ireland, Galway

Who is the main contact?

Éamonn Ó Dochartaigh

Contact information

Type(s)

Public

Contact name

Mr Éamonn Ó Dochartaigh

Contact details

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number

Participate_v2_supported_vs_unsupported

Study information

Scientific Title

A randomised controlled trial of the effectiveness of the Participate online cognitive-behavioural treatment programme for social anxiety for higher education students whose social anxiety scores exceed cut-off points on the SIAS-6/SPS-6 social anxiety scales, comparing changes in social anxiety score at programme end and 3-month follow-up for participants with weekly online support; those without weekly online support; and those on a waiting-list.

Acronym

Participate

Study objectives

Are the supported and the unsupported versions of the Participate programme effective for the treatment of social anxiety as measured by the short form of the combined Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS-6) and the Social Phobia Scale (SPS-6), in comparison with a wait-list control.

Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

Research Ethics Committee of the National University of Ireland, University Road, Galway, Ireland, 11/08/2014 (ref: 14/JUNE/06) and 14/08/2015 (ref: 15/JUL/12).

Primary study design

Interventional

Study design

Multi-centre, interventional randomised controlled trial

Study type(s)

Treatment

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Social anxiety.

Interventions

There are 3 arms to the trial:

1. Group 1 will undertake an online cognitive-behavioural programme for social anxiety with weekly support via email
2. Group 2 will undertake the same programme but without weekly support
3. Group 3 will be tested before and after the programme period without treatment, since they are on a waiting-list for the programme

Intervention Type

Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

Primary outcome measures are to assess the severity of social anxiety. They consist of:

1. The 6-question short form of the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS-6)
2. The 6-question short form of the Social Phobia Scale (SPS-6)

They are measured at completion of an introductory module; after 8 weeks (at programme end); and 3 months later in a follow-up.

Key secondary outcome(s)

1. Social anxiety, consisting of the short form of the Social Phobia Inventory (miniSPIN), and administered at weekly intervals during the 8-week programme
2. Severity of depression and suicidal ideation, consisting of the 9-question form of the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) and administered at the end of an introductory module; after 8 weeks (at programme end); and 3 months later in a follow-up
3. Self-reported social, academic and occupational functioning, consisting of some purpose-designed questions, which are administered at weekly intervals during the 8-week programme, at programme end, and 3 months later in a follow-up

Completion date

01/09/2016

Eligibility**Key inclusion criteria**

1. Participants must be registered students of the relevant higher-education institution
2. Participants must have a score 6 or more on the SIAS-6 questionnaire or 3 or more on the SPS-6 psychometric scales

Participant type(s)

Other

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Adult

Sex

All

Key exclusion criteria

Participants must not:

1. be acutely suicidal
2. begin or change a dose of psychoactive medication in the period from 1 month preceding the programme until its end
3. be receiving psychotherapeutic treatment in the period from 1 month preceding the programme until its end
4. have a history of bipolar depression
5. have previously received cognitive-behavioural therapy

Date of first enrolment

01/09/2014

Date of final enrolment

01/03/2016

Locations

Countries of recruitment

United Kingdom

Scotland

Ireland

Study participating centre

National University of Ireland, Galway

University Road

Galway

Ireland

-

Study participating centre

Dublin Institute of Technology

Aungier St

Dublin 2

Ireland

-

Study participating centre

University of West Scotland

Almada Street

Hamilton

South Lanarkshire

Hamilton

United Kingdom

ML3 0JB

Sponsor information

Organisation

National University of Ireland, Galway

ROR

<https://ror.org/03bea9k73>

Funder(s)

Funder type

University/education

Funder Name

Student Project Fund, National University of Ireland, Galway

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan**IPD sharing plan summary**

Available on request

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Study website	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes