

6 NOVEMBER 2014

Experts discuss the rise and treatment of narcissism

More than 300 health professionals and community members will visit the University of Wollongong (UOW) from 7-8 November for the 8th Annual Conference on the treatment of personality disorders.

NSW Mental Health Commissioner Mr John Feneley will open the event, which will focus on understanding narcissistic and borderline disorders.

Psychologist Professor Brin Grenyer, who is the Director of UOW's Project Air Strategy, which aims to enhance treatment options for people with Personality Disorder and their families and carers, said with the growth in social media, there is a heightened perception of a culture of entitlement and narcissism.

However, the flipside of intense attention-seeking behaviours and preoccupation with beauty, wealth and success, are difficulties in maintaining meaningful relationships, mental health and drug and alcohol problems, and more severe personality disorder problems.

"We currently have few good treatment studies or guidelines for treating narcissism, yet the epidemic of narcissism can be so destructive to relationships," Professor Grenyer said.

"The community also suffers when people make decisions that hurt society as a whole, like during the recent global economic crisis, or in countries being lead by people more interested in their own personal gain than the needs of the people they are meant to represent."

Professor Ken Levy, from the New York Presbyterian Hospital and Cornell Medical Center, will present new results at the Conference that will advance our understanding of effective approaches to treating narcissism.

"Narcissistic personality disorder is a treatable disorder but it can be a very slow process and requires a lot of patience and support for therapists doing this work," Professor Levy said.

"It is difficult to treat because although people can appear strong, underneath narcissism is a person who can feel very small and weak inside and suffer low self-esteem. This vulnerability sadly also makes it hard for them to benefit from treatment. It is imperative that we develop ways to reach out and treat this disorder, because left untreated; the effects on society can be very severe. The work being done in Wollongong is one good example, but we need greater investment," He said.

The 8th Annual Conference on the treatment of personality disorders is hosted by UOW's Project Air Strategy for Personality Disorders in collaboration with NSW Health and the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute.

Media contact: Elise Pitt, Media & PR Officer, UOW, +61 2 4221 3079, +61 422 959 953, epitt@uow.edu.au.

About the University of Wollongong:

The University of Wollongong (UOW) is globally ranked as one of Australia's best modern universities and currently sits among the top two per cent of universities in the world. UOW has built an international reputation for world-class research and exceptional teaching quality. It has a five-star status for its 'educational experience' and 'graduate outcomes'.