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Disorder focus of study

■ Psychology department to examine the Obsessive Compulsive Disorder's effects in children.

BY MICHELLE STARR
Staff writer

The UNL psychology department hopes to change the lives of children, adolescents and families affected by Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln psychology department, working through the Anxiety Disorders Clinic in Burnett Hall, is conducting a study on children and adolescents with OCD.

The study might help children suffering from OCD who may experience family, academic and social difficulties, said Susan Swearer, director of the Youth OCD Project.

"We are interested in family factors that help children with OCD get better," said Swearer, assistant professor in the school psychology program.

OCD can affect anyone at any age, including children and adolescents. People with OCD suffer from a pattern of unwanted recurring thoughts or actions that they feel they cannot control.

OCD causes its victims to perform compulsive or ritualistic activities, such as repeated hand washing, counting or making sure locks are locked.

Swearer is working with Debra Hope, associate professor of psychology and director of the Anxiety Disorders Clinic at UNL, to find how biological and family factors influence children and adolescents with OCD.

Swearer will be using a 20-week cognitive behavior therapy treatment program to try to link the compulsive thoughts and behaviors together. Along with treatment, Swearer is evaluating cognitive behavior treatment for OCD sufferers.

People with the disorder might have problems with everyday situa-

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KATIE HILGENKAMP
clinical director

tions causing them to feel physically and emotionally isolated from friends and family, Swearer said.

Students might show slowness or perfectionism during class assignments or tests. They might feel embarrassed in social situations when they are compelled to perform repeated actions, she said.

Children with OCD might also feel guilty for the extent and content of their obsessions and their effects on the family, Swearer said.

Successful treatment of OCD needs to target the school, family and individuals, Swearer said.

The project begins with several hours of initial interviews with the parent and child. Later the participants and their families will attend treatment sessions lasting an hour and a half each week.

Because researchers across the world still aren't sure what causes the disorder, speculation of the cause of OCD still exists.

The National Mental Health Association has seen evidence of a possible cause through brain scans. The brains of people with OCD have different patterns of brain activity than people with other mental illnesses or those without mental illness at all.

Swearer said there is also evidence that OCD is a genetic disorder because it may afflict members of the same family.

The association said it no longer attributes OCD to family problems or actions learned during childhood, such as an emphasis placed on cleanliness.

"What families do in childhood is not related to OCD," Swearer said.

The association said about 2.3 percent of the U.S. population — about 3.3 million people — suffer from OCD. The disorder affects women and men equally and usually starts in adolescence or early childhood.

Katie Hilgenkamp, the clinical director of the Child Guidance Center, said UNL's research was important for Lincoln.

"It sounds very positive. Parents really do need help. OCD is becoming more commonly diagnosed in children. I applaud anything that is trying to help the families," Hilgenkamp said.

The Child Guidance Center is an outpatient mental health clinic for kids and families.

The participants in the UNL study and their families said things were going well, Swearer said.

Swearer also said UNL's research is a positive step for Nebraska, which may be lacking in OCD treatment opportunities.

"The family of one of the OCD clients I'm currently treating had a hard time finding people in Nebraska who were trained to treat OCD," Swearer said.

The Youth OCD project, which began in late August, currently has two participants but is still open for more subjects.

Anyone younger than 18 years old with OCD is encouraged to call the Youth OCD project at the Anxiety Disorders Clinic, Swearer said. Treatment during the study is free of charge.

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Fun run to start Homecoming

BY MICHELLE STARR
Staff writer

Get ready to lace up the sneakers and kick up some dust.

It's homecoming time again, and the festivities, co-sponsored by the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska, Student Alumni Association and Campus Recreation Intramurals, will begin Sunday with a 5k fun run/walk at 1 p.m. on East Campus.

The third annual run is just the beginning of the homecoming week.

"It was fun. It was all students our age. There weren't all those competitive runners there," said Niki Burger, one of last year's fun run winners, who is a senior secondary education major.

John Grebe, the other winner of last year's fun run, agreed.

"I like to run when there are a lot of people around. It's more of a social event. It didn't matter who won," said the senior exercise science major.

Chris Linder, a graduate student in education administration, said she is expecting 300 to 500 participants, depending on the weather.

"It was nice to have the course on East Campus. It's a pretty big campus, and I had not seen very much of it," Grebe said.

The winners of the event — one woman, one man — will be presented with medallions Thursday night at Tailgate on the Turf.

Burger still has her medallion, and Grebe's is on display in his fraternity house, Sigma Phi Epsilon.

As for the competition, Grebe, who runs about 6 to 7 miles a day, will be competing again this year. However, Burger is visiting her family and will not be able to compete.

Law & Order

Area near railroad to be fenced off

An area near the intersection of 14th and Holdrege streets will be fenced off to illegal parkers during Saturday's home football game, Police Capt. Joy Citta said.

Citta said the area near the Burlington-Northern railroad was used heavily during Nebraska's home game against Southern Mississippi Sept. 18, even though the area was labeled no parking.

"It interfered with our ability to move traffic along the street," Citta said.

"I think some people were parking because it was only a \$5 ticket."

A total of 120 cars were parked in the area, Citta said. Metal stakes linked by a string of flags will block

access to the area, Citta said, who added that any cars found parking in the area will be towed.

Car catches fire near residence hall

A car caught fire near Sandoz Residence Hall on Wednesday causing an estimated \$10,000 in damage to the car, University Police Sergeant Mylo Bushing said.

Bushing said the fire started under the car's hood near the battery. University Police were notified by firefighters en route to the scene.

The car's owner could not be found after the fire, Bushing said, and has yet to contact police.

Compiled by senior staff writer Jake Bleed.