

*Commentary*

# The impact of obsessive-compulsive disorder on daily life and management

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## ABOUT THE STUDY

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a chronic mental health condition characterized by intrusive, unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviours or mental acts (compulsions) that individuals feel driven to perform.

OCD affects individuals across all age groups and can manifest in various ways. Obsessions are persistent, unwanted thoughts, images, or urges that cause distress or anxiety. Common obsessions include fears of contamination, worries about harming oneself or others, unwanted sexual thoughts, and a need for symmetry or exactness. These thoughts are intrusive and often recognized by the individual as irrational, yet they are difficult to ignore or suppress.

## Causes and risk factors

Genetics play a significant role, as OCD tends to run in families. Specific genes linked to serotonin regulation, a neurotransmitter involved in mood and anxiety, may contribute to the disorder.

Neurobiologically, abnormalities in brain circuits involving the orbitofrontal cortex, anterior cingulate cortex, and basal ganglia have been implicated in OCD. These brain regions are associated with decision-making, emotional regulation, and the processing of fear and anxiety. Neuroimaging studies have shown that individuals with OCD often exhibit hyperactivity in these areas.

Environmental factors, such as stressful life events, trauma, and infections (particularly streptococcal infections in a condition known as Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal infections or PANDAS), can trigger or exacerbate OCD symptoms. Childhood abuse or neglect, though not directly causing OCD, may increase vulnerability to the disorder.

## Symptoms and diagnosis

The Obsessions are repetitive and persistent thoughts, urges, or images that are intrusive and unwanted, and they typically cause significant anxiety or distress. Common types of obsessions include:

**Contamination:** Fear of germs, dirt, or environmental contaminants leading to excessive cleaning or avoidance behaviours.

**Symmetry and order:** A need for things to be symmetrical or in a specific order, resulting in repetitive arranging or organizing.

**Forbidden or taboo thoughts:** Intrusive thoughts involving violence, sexual content, or blasphemy that are distressing and inconsistent with the individual's values.

**Mental rituals:** Repeating prayers, phrases, or numbers silently to neutralize intrusive thoughts.

## Medications

Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs), such as fluoxetine, sertraline, and fluvoxamine, are commonly prescribed and have been shown to reduce OCD symptoms by increasing serotonin levels in the brain. Clomipramine, a tricyclic antidepressant, is also effective but may have more side effects. In some cases, antipsychotic medications may be added to the treatment regimen to augment the effects of SSRIs.

## Challenges of OCD in daily life

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) presents numerous challenges in daily life due to the persistent and intrusive nature of obsessions and the repetitive behaviours or mental acts known as compulsions. Here are some common challenges faced by individuals with OCD and coping strategies that can be helpful.

**Intrusive thoughts:** People with OCD often experience unwelcome, persistent thoughts, images, or urges that cause significant anxiety. These thoughts can be distressing and hard to ignore.

**Perfectionism:** A need for things to be "just right" can lead to excessive checking, organizing, or cleaning, making it difficult to complete tasks efficiently.

**Avoidance:** To prevent triggering obsessions, individuals might avoid certain places, people, or activities, which can limit their lifestyle and opportunities.

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**Impaired relationships:** OCD can strain relationships with family, friends, and colleagues due to misunderstandings, frustration, or the need for reassurance.

**Emotional distress:** Constant anxiety, frustration, and guilt associated with OCD can lead to emotional distress and, in some cases, depression.