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The Roots of OCD

Liya Panayotova, Psychologist, liyap.com 10.8K reads

Nearly 2.5% of the world population, made up of approximately 7 billion people, is affected by obsessive-compulsive disorder. That's 175 million individuals, who will experience one or more symptoms of OCD during their lifetime. The symptoms usually occur during adolescence, but can also be activated at any point during the lifespan.

The above may sound like a grim statistic, but keep in mind that not all individuals who exhibit mere symptoms can or will be diagnosed with OCD. Many of us might experience just one or two symptoms, which is insufficient for a diagnosis, but enough to interfere with our day-to-day activities.

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Are We “a Little OCD”?

Today, we tend to joke about “being a little OCD”, especially when we see someone arranging his/her books in alphabetical order, or when a friend is obsessed about keeping his desk clean. The harsh truth about OCD is that it's just as damaging as any other mood disorder. In addition, OCD is not just about arranging stuff or wanting to keep your personal space nice and tidy. This serious condition comes in many “flavors”, like for instance: arrangers, hoarders, checkers, washers and many more.

But why do experts consider OCD an anxiety disorder? If anxiety is the number one factor, why do we call it “obsessive-compulsive disorder”?

What is OCD?

As you have probably heard by now, OCD has two main components: 1) obsessions and 2) compulsions.

Obsessions

Obsessions are intrusive and unwanted thoughts or images that linger in your mind, generating stress and anxiety. There are hundreds of thoughts going through our minds each day, but there’s one huge difference between obsessive and normal thoughts – obsessions don’t go away. An obsession will repeat itself over and over again, making you completely unable to focus on other activities. This is the only reason why obsessions generate so much stress and anxiety.

Compulsions

In order to eliminate the negative tension caused by obsessions, some people engage in various rituals called compulsions. Eliminating stress, fear and anxiety is the sole purpose of compulsions. What most people who deal with OCD don’t realize is that these rituals are only effective for a short period of time. Sadly, the more you engage in various compulsions, the stronger your obsessive thoughts and images will become.

In other words, obsessive-compulsive disorder is a never-ending circle of intrusive, repetitive thoughts and pointless rituals. What keeps these two components bound together is anxiety. Without the anxiety caused by obsessive thoughts or images, it would be unnecessary to engage in “soothing” rituals.

What Does OCD Look Like?

As we mentioned earlier, having the same thought over and over again is extremely frustrating because it keeps you from going on with your life. Imagine that you wake up in the morning and before you can sit down to a nice breakfast, you have to obsessively clean the table with 3 different solutions, wet wipes and a clean kitchen towel. After that, you need to “disinfect” the stove, pan, fork, knife, plate and every kitchen utensil that will be used for cooking and serving. All this trouble for just one thought that keeps repeating itself – “Germs are everywhere”.

The Manifestation of Anxiety

For someone who's dealing with OCD on a daily basis, this is not "just one thought". If that person doesn't act according to the content of their obsessive thought, anxiety will immediately make its presence known. It will manifest as heart palpitations, lack of focus, sweating, trembling and nervousness. The person's past experience has shown that certain rituals provide comfort and escape from the heavy burden of anxiety.

But here's the tricky part. After "indulging" in compulsions, fear and anxiety will indeed disappear, but only for a short period of time. In reality, what the rituals do is feed one's anxiety, by providing proof that there is indeed reason to be frightened.

Is There a Way Out?

Strictly speaking, compulsions will only provide an extremely short-term solution to the obsessions. The harsh truth is that next time your anxiety will be even stronger, which means more compulsions that will lead to stronger obsessions. This entire vicious circle is maintained by anxiety. Once you find a more suitable way to deal with anxiety, you'll no longer need rituals (compulsions). Without the constant presence of compulsions, you'll have enough time to think about the irrationality of your obsessions.

As always, we invite you to adopt a step-by-step approach which will enable you to regain health and well-being.

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