

MODULE 3C

Activity #4 Handout

Group #7: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) (Fact Sheet)

What is OCD?

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder is a disturbance of specific brain circuits that leads to two different but related symptoms called “obsessions” and “compulsions”. In OCD a person experiences persistent, recurrent, intrusive and unwanted thoughts, ideas or fears (obsessions) and repeated, ritualized behaviours (compulsions) that are done to try and stop the worry and anxiety brought on by the obsessions.

Obsessions are frequent, persistent, recurring thoughts that the person wants to get rid of but can't. These thoughts are so pervasive that they can take over a person's life, constantly intruding into and disrupting everyday activities. The person does not really believe that the thoughts are true but has great difficulty in stopping them. These recurring thoughts cause significant worry and anxiety and may lead to compulsions. Obsessive thoughts commonly involve contamination (for example "there are germs on my hands and I will catch a horrible disease") or harm ("my brother will die").

Compulsions are the persistent repetitive rituals that a person does to try and obtain relief from the obsession. Common compulsions include: ordering, washing, counting, tapping, and repeating. These compulsions can take many hours in a day to perform and a person experiencing them frequently feels a strong urge to do them even though they do not want to.

Although OCD can begin at many different points in a person's life, most commonly it starts before age 20. About 2-3 percent of the population will experience OCD during their lifetime.

Everybody experiences occasional repetitive thoughts, phrases, worries (such as: did I lock the door) or even musical snippets (called “ear worms”). These are normal and are not obsessions. Everyone also experiences occasional repetitive behaviours such as checking to make sure the door is locked or the stove is turned off (even though they know it is). These are not compulsions.

What Causes OCD?

We think that a combination of different things, including genetics and environmental factors lead to OCD. One recently discovered environmental factor is a bacterial infection that leads to an immune reaction involving the brain circuits that are involved in OCD.

How can OCD be Treated?

A number of treatments are available for OCD. These include both biological and psychological treatments. The Serotonin Specific Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRI) medicines and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) are prescribed together to help treat the person that has OCD. Sometimes family therapy is provided because having OCD can affect how a person's family is doing.

A person with OCD can also do a number of other things to try and help. These include exercise and activities that require intensive concentration. While these can be somewhat helpful, they do not take the place of SSRI and CBT treatments.

Group #7: Understanding Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) (Reporting Page)

What is OCD?

How common is OCD?

Describe some of the symptoms of OCD:

What combination of factors is thought to cause OCD?

What type of treatment is available for people with OCD?

What other kinds of support can help people with OCD recover?