

OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE BEHAVIOR IN ELEMENTARY AGED CHILDREN

Ida Webb

Eastern New Mexico University, Portales, New Mexico, USA

Corresponding author: Michael.Shaughnessy@enmu.edu

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses primarily on Obsessive Compulsive Behavior (OCD) among elementary school children. The purpose of this paper is to determine the effects of OCD on children below the age of ten years and establish how these effects may impact their lives both in childhood and adulthood. The paper starts by focusing on a definition of the condition with the aim of differentiating it from other related mental health issues. Following the definition in the introduction, the paper analyses the signs and symptoms associated with OCD. This segment is followed by the impacts of the condition on elementary school children and the conclusive remarks focus on steps that can be taken to improve the school environment for children with OCD aged below ten years.

Keywords: *Obsessive Compulsive Behavior, compulsion, perfectionism*

INTRODUCTION

Obsessive Compulsion Behavior refers to a mental health condition in which an individual feels the need to do something repeatedly regardless of attaining optimal effectiveness or efficiency in the same issue. The result is that someone suffering from this condition never finds rest since regardless of how well things may be, they will always feel the need to improve on the existing situation (Tanir et al., 2020). The result is that these individuals display symptoms related to anxiety disorders, but are different in that unreasonable thoughts and fears bring about the repeated need to keep on doing the same thing repeatedly. To understand OCD, one first needs to understand that there are different types of this condition. Each type affects an individual differently, and as a result, a different approach must be

taken to ensure that the symptoms associated with the specific type are minimized (Fineberg et al., 2020).

Currently, in the US, more than 2.2 million adults suffer from this condition. Out of this population, the prevalence among men and women seems to be even but only about a third of this population experienced these symptoms from childhood. These statistics imply that a major segment of the population is affected by this condition, making it a major healthcare concern. This paper focuses specifically on the impacts the condition might have on elementary-level children, and how these impacts may affect their learning process. Finally, the paper focuses on steps that can be taken to improve on this condition and to create a better learning environment for these elementary-level students. The goal of this paper is to establish limitations that this condition may create for these children and find out the best way to relieve these effects to better the lives of these children, especially in a school setting.

TYPES OF OCD

One of the main types of OCD is contamination OCD, one of the most considered types when an individual hears about OCD. This condition refers to a situation whereby a patient is in constant fear of contracting a disease. For example, during the ongoing pandemic, an individual suffering from contamination OCD would find it almost impossible to leave the house or interact with other people since they will feel that such interactions would most probably expose them to germs which would be a risk to their health (Weeland et al., 2021).

However, while the general public is expected to observe these rules as well, for patients suffering from contamination OCD, chances are they are aversive to any form of physical contact since this is considered one of the fastest ways through which germs can be transmitted. The result is that with or without a global pandemic to worry about, these individuals will engage in minimum physical interaction is any. The result of contamination OCD is that individuals end up cutting themselves off from society in fear of germs and leading lonely lives. Furthermore, since people cannot exist independently of each other, this condition denies the individual an opportunity to interact with other people, bringing about anxiety and other depressive tendencies.

To cope with contamination OCD, most individuals dive into perfectionism, which is considered another type of OCD. Perfectionism can be found in the form of repeatedly washing one's hands or cleaning services one encounters to avoid exposing themselves to germs. The compulsive tendencies often mean that an individual might go to extreme lengths to ensure that their surfaces or bodies are clean. For instance, if an individual washes their hands too much to prevent

contamination, they are likely to wear off the dead skin layer that prevents ease entry of germs into the body (Weeland et al., 2021).

As a result, this practice, which was meant to safeguard these individuals from germs, exposes them to a higher risk of contamination. The result is that their physical health is threatened by such perfectionism.

Other forms of perfectionism are not a response to contamination, but are an OCD type by themselves. This refers to a situation whereby an individual feels the compulsion to arrange items in patterns only they can recognize. Whenever said items do not fall into these patterns, the individuals experience mental and psychological unrest. The impact of perfectionism is that all elements cannot be arranged in a recognizable pattern in life. As a result, when this individual is incapable of arranging these items, they resort to mental turmoil, which often affects their ability to operate optimally (Weeland et al., 2021). The main problem brought about by this type of OCD is that the affected individuals often find themselves at crossroads with those they interact with. For instance, a guest would keep questioning their host's choice in arranging their cabinet or utensils in a certain way that does not follow any recognizable pattern. The result is that social relationships are strained due to this condition, and as a result, one can develop either doubt or harmful intention, which is the next type of OCD.

Doubt or harm exists in inverse OCD conditions. For instance, when an individual suffering from OCD begins to doubt themselves and all their observations, they are likely to withdraw from society. This is mainly because for most individuals suffering from OCD, their ability to recognize patterns or lack thereof is the unique characteristic that makes them who they are. However, if the same individuals are informed that their actions and conditions are contrary to what society expects and are therefore considered abnormal, their reaction might involve self-doubt. When an individual engages in self-doubt, they are unlikely to do much with their lives since they feel that every decision made might result from overthinking the situation (Weeland et al., 2021). The other possible impact resulting from OCD is harm. This refers to a situation whereby the patient might harm themselves or others. Self-harm is mostly associated with doubt. If an individual feel that their OCD rather than logic may have promoted their past actions, they may opt to harm themselves to prevent future occurrences whereby they may harm others. On the contrary, if an individual suffering from OCD feels that all other people are wrong, they may decide to correct this scenario for their patterns to make sense. There have been cases in which an individual killed people because the number of people in their family did not make sense to them. The implication is that if left untreated and uncontrolled, OCD can result in lethal repercussions both for the patient and those close to the patient.

Finally, forbidden thoughts are considered the final main type of OCD. In this case, the individual is involved in violent, religious, or sexual thoughts that fail to meet the logical dimensions. The most common type of symptom, in this case, involves an individual becoming too much obsessed with engaging in sexual pleasures outside the legal provisions of sexual indulgences. For instance, an individual could be obsessed with rape sex, and in some cases, these thoughts drive the individual into attempting these actions. In other cases, an individual might feel the compulsion to engage in violent behavior without a logical explanation for their indulgence (Weeland et al., 2021). The result is that these individuals often engage in these activities or find themselves submerged into these thoughts to the extent that they have nothing else going on in their heads. The two most common outcomes of this dimension of OCD are that the individual will either act out on their intrusive thoughts, resulting in them hurting themselves or others, or keeping these thoughts to themselves, resulting in anxiety or depression. In either case, the individual will not be capable of making better life decisions, which will ultimately affect their productivity.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF OCD ON ELEMENTARY AGE CHILDREN

To understand how this condition might affect children in the elementary level of education, one needs to first consider the signs and symptoms of OCD among children that age. One of the leading symptoms is the constant worrying about death. This refers to a scenario whereby a child will not engage in any activity considered normal for other children because they fear death. In most cases for children, this symptom is triggered when a person close to them dies before these children are not old enough to understand the concept of death, and the information is not efficiently revealed to them. For instance, when a family member dies, most families prefer to tell their children that the family member went to be with god or went on a journey from whence they would not return (Luo et al., 2020). These concepts are easier for children since they can relate depending on their backgrounds, and until these children are old enough, the narrative must be maintained with further deaths in the family. However, when these children are bluntly informed that a member of their family has died, they tend to associate the rest of their lives with death. For these children, anything as simple as leaving their beds could result in an accident that would kill them. Food is also considered a major death risk for children suffering from OCD. The implication is that these children's lives are almost completely halted, disrupted, and there is no easy way to get them involved in any type of activity without them thinking that they would die from the same.

Additionally, children suffering from OCD experience extreme fears about doing something bad. For instance, if a child learns that an adult driving a car ran over a child crossing the road on their way to school, such a child might never feel confident about doing anything with their lives (Brezinka et al., 2020). This is mainly because any action they consider taking is often considered to lead to self-harm or harm to others.

For example, it becomes particularly challenging for a child facing this condition to engage in any childhood activities since they fear they might harm others, affecting them both mentally and psychologically. Additionally, when these children are faced with OCD, they are likely to develop a fear of being punished for doing the wrong thing (Luo et al., 2020). Therefore, even if their actions are not likely to harm anyone, these children will still refrain from taking any form of action since they fear that they will get punished if it turns out that they are wrong.

Moreover, most children this age facing OCD feel that everything they do needs to be perfect, and anything short of perfect is considered a failure. An example of how this might affect a child's life is when a child does not score everything in their exams. The result is that this child will feel that they are incapable of performing perfectly, which often tends to result in them withdrawing from performing at all (Abramowitz et al., 2017). When children do not allow themselves to make mistakes in life, they will either develop depression or fail to accomplish anything in their lives since they were too scared to risk anything at all. The consequence of this condition is that children will hibernate despite having crucial talents and skills that could be used to better society.

Finally, these children may experience disturbing and unwanted thoughts about sexual indulgences or hurting others. For children to feel the desire to hurt others or to experience illogical sexual desires is beyond normal. This is mainly because, unlike adults, children most probably have no experience regarding sexuality or violence. Therefore, the mere fact that these children may feel the compulsion to engage in these activities means that something must be wrong with their psychological condition. However, each of these symptoms is riskier if a child experiences it within the school setting (Weeland et al., 2021).

This is mainly because, unlike home settings where it is possible to maintain constant supervision of every child during every moment, schools have more children making it almost impossible to oversee each child. For that matter, OCD has far-reaching impacts in a school setting than in a home setting, and these far-reaching impacts should be considered if one seeks to determine a way to improve the lives of these children.

IMPACT OF OCD ON ELEMENTARY-AGE CHILDREN

One of the main impacts of OCD among elementary-age children is that it interrupts these children's relationships with their peers. During elementary school is when a child is expected to form their first interpersonal relationships. This is mainly because, at this age, these children have just learned to communicate and can therefore engage in definitive communication that can help with the creation of relationships. Additionally, these children have begun to learn about their likes and dislikes during the same age and passions and can identify with other children with shared passions. This being the case, elementary school forms the foundation of every person's interpersonal relationships. However, when a child at this stage is suffering from OCD, they are not likely to develop these relationships (Walitza et al., 2020).

The main reason for bringing this about is that these children may be irritated by the slightest form of imperfection in their peers. Imperfection shapes the lives of children in elementary school mainly because, at this age, these children are learning almost everything in life for the first time (Martin et al., 2020). However, when a child suffers from OCD, they are likely to blame their peers for not being perfect already. The result is that these children will be considered weird by their friends, which is not a major trait, that children this age look for in making friendships. Additionally, these children may be constantly afraid of contacting germs might mean that they will completely avoid interacting with other children to keep their fears from coming true (Abramowitz et al., 2017). Consequently, these children are likely to fail at making friends. As established, when children this age are incapable of making friends, they will most likely become withdrawn from any group activity. Most of the elementary level learning takes place in groups. Therefore, since these children cannot participate in group work, they will miss out on an opportunity to learn, which will affect their lives both in school and at home.

Furthermore, when a child in elementary school faces OCD, they are likely to be distracted by patterns that do not add up or the plight for perfection that they will miss out on their education and childhood. During elementary school, a child's brain is still developing, which means that most children can only concentrate on one task at a time. This means that if a child has anything else on their mind besides elements of their education, they will most likely not learn anything during their school session (Bedford et al., 2020). The result of OCD on children this age is that they will seem absent-minded during most of their classes, which implies that they will not be learning much from these classes.

Additionally, at this age, children are expected to actively participate in the learning process if they wish to learn anything. However, most children suffering

from this condition are too afraid of failing that they may not be willing to try. The result of such a predicament is that these children will become completely withdrawn from the learning process, which will ultimately make it impossible for them to learn.

Finally, as earlier indicated, it is more challenging to maintain constant supervision of children within a school setting, which means that at some point in time, a child might experience a sexual or violent urge when they are not close to any supervisory figure. The result is that this child might have an opportunity to act out these obsessions. This is one reason there are cases of child-on-child rape or violence in elementary school, despite these children not knowing much about life to want to commit these crimes (Santore et al., 2020). The overall result of this impact is that the lives of children victims of these actions will become traumatized, making these children afraid of going to school lest something similar happens to them again (Krause et al., 2021). On the other hand, if these children are incapable of acting out on these intrusive thoughts, they are likely to occupy every essence of their being, resulting in psychopathic tendencies. Either way, children that face OCD at the elementary level are likely to face extreme challenges both in childhood and adulthood. Therefore, it is specifically important to address issues that may promote OCD to ensure that the lives of these children are secured while in school and that the environment allows OCD children to study efficiently.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

One of the most effective ways of dealing with OCD in a school setting is through therapy whereby both parents and their children are involved in these sessions. The importance of a therapy is to ensure that both the child and parent understand the risk that is likely to face them regarding the condition at hand. For instance, in some cases, a parent might not be aware that their child has OCD, and it only takes a professional to convince them otherwise. When a parent has no idea that their child is obsessive and compulsive, they are less likely to handle them with the required care and may, in turn, expose them to certain triggers that might impact their lives in school. However, by ensuring that all parents with OCD children understand the extent of the condition and the best way to alleviate the symptoms, the lives of these children will be improved (McGrath & Abbott, 2019).

Furthermore, teachers should get training on dealing with children suffering from OCD whereby they are not overly punished or let to get away with their actions without consequences. Finally, other children within these schools should get an education on relating with individuals suffering from this condition to improve their understanding of actions performed by the patients and learn how to better their lives. Ultimately, these steps will be aimed at making the school

environment adaptable for children suffering from OCD. It is, therefore, the responsibility of all stakeholders in elementary level education to ensure that children suffering from OCD are not misunderstood and that measures are implemented to make their lives at school easier.

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