

Exploring The Etiology of OCD With Women's Health: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This paper aims to combine research to examine why women are at a greater risk of developing Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) in adolescence and adulthood by exploring its relations to its most common comorbid mental disorders and the hormonal imbalances of female reproductive health. The condition is often concurrent with major depressive disorder (MDD) and general anxiety disorder (GAD), both of which disproportionately affect women. The paper will utilize observations from preceding medical studies in a literature review, utilizing inductive research methods to draw possible connections between the prevalence of OCD in women and the other mental disorders of interest, along with highlighting any holes in previous medical knowledge due to gender-based data gaps.

1. Introduction

1.1. Problem Definition

The interdisciplinary project in data science addresses various aspects of OCD, such as why women are more likely to have the disorder, and how other disorders are concurrent with OCD. The project will be unique because although surveys have been conducted in the past, there is little to no research on why OCD is specifically prevalent in young adult women—determining why would improve women's health and allow medical organizations to begin taking measures against risk factors.

1.2. Research Questions

Why do women have higher OCD rates in adolescence and adulthood compared to men? Do mental health disorders that predominantly affect women have any significant effect on the development of OCD? Do women's health issues like pregnancy and ovarian hormones make women more susceptible to OCD than men? Are there any noteworthy gender data gaps surrounding the possible links between the prevalence of OCD in women and the hormonal changes that come with female reproductive health?

1.3. Background

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is an anxiety disorder in which individuals have obsessions; consuming, unwanted thoughts, ideas, and doubts, and are compelled to perform repetitive physical or mental tasks as a way of counteracting the overwhelming stress and anxiety. OCD is often comorbid with mood disorders, the most frequent being major depressive disorder and anxiety. Comorbidity is when multiple disorders affect the same person simultaneously or sequen-

tially¹. Multiple surveys and sources have found that women are twice as likely to be diagnosed with major depressive disorder and anxiety disorder than men. OCD is also slightly more commonly found in women than men, especially in adolescence and adulthood, with a study finding that women were 1.6 times more likely to experience OCD in their lifetimes². According to preceding investigations, gender plays a difference in the disorder's expression, with women usually experiencing acute onset symptoms and an intermittent course of the illness. Perinatal women are also known to be at a greater risk of developing OCD, with hormonal influences from the postpartum period, pregnancy, and menopause seemingly having some association with the disorder. Notably, the subject lacks any conclusions on the environmental, endocrinological, and behavioral etiology of OCD, and the possible links between it, GAD, MDD, and any women's health topics. The potential benefit of this study is to draw connections between previous observations and data to identify why OCD is more prevalent in women and open the path for possible future evaluations of risk factors for females, address and bring attention to gender-based medical data gaps, and improve women's health and safety.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Environmental Etiology of OCD: Stressful Life Events

The development of OCD has been related to a multitude of factors: environment, behavior, genetics, and biology. A literature review attempted to evaluate the environmental risk factors of OCD highlighted several women's health subjects,

¹Fontenelle & Hasler. (2008). The analytical epidemiology of obsessive-compulsive disorder: Risk factors and correlates. *Progress in Neuro-Psychopharmacology and Biological Psychiatry* 32(1).1–15.

²Yasgur (2020). 'Worldwide Prevalence' of OCD Higher in Women vs Men. *Medscape Medical News*.