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Examining the role of sex differences in obsessive-compulsive symptom dimensions

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Abstract

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a notably heterogeneous disorder. As such, there has been increased interest in subtyping OCD into homogeneous entities using biological characteristics such as sex. Whereas there is large consensus in the literature regarding sex differences in the phenotypic expression of OCD, there are numerous disadvantages to how OCD has been previously measured and assessed. The present investigation explored potential sex differences in OCD symptoms using the Dimensional Obsessive Compulsive Scale (DOCS), a redesigned measure that more reliably assesses the four most commonly replicated OCD symptom dimensions. A large sample of community participants with elevated levels of OCD symptoms ($N = 297$) was recruited from an online crowdsourcing marketplace. Surprisingly, no differences in means were observed across sexes. However, results did reveal sex differences when examining relations between OCD dimensions. In particular, correlations between the OCD symptom dimensions were stronger in males compared to females. The common perception of OCD as a heterogeneous disorder may hold for females more so than for males. Future research should seek to replicate these findings using multimethod approaches including clinical, behavioral, and neuroimaging assessments.

Keywords: obsessive-compulsive disorder; OCD; sex; gender; DOCS

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