



# The Association Between Compulsive Buying Disorder and Childhood Trauma



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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Compulsive buying disorder (CBD) is characterized by the recurrent purchase of unnecessary or undesirable products, resulting in severe negative effects. There is a strong empirical connection between childhood trauma and a range of self-regulation difficulties in adulthood. Adults with a history of childhood trauma generally suffer with self-regulation, including compulsive buying disorder, according to research.

The objective of our research was to define compulsive buying disorder and shed light on its origins, link to other psychiatric diseases, and the most effective treatment for it.

**Methods:** A selective review of literature published between 2000 and 2022 on compulsive buying disorder.

**Results:** We discovered a substantial link between early exposure to stressful experiences and the development of a compulsive shopping habit in adulthood. The disease of compulsive buying is very impulsive and can lead to out-of-control financial constraints. Compulsive purchasing disorder is associated with stress and depression, self-blame and low self-esteem, and is frequently viewed as a coping technique in those who feel unable to handle their difficulties. Although compulsive buying disorder is receiving more attention in consumer and psychological literature, there are few theoretical and empirical studies on its origins and treatment.

**Conclusion:** Public policy measures that focus on education, legislation, and family professionals are likely to be of assistance to those who struggle with CBD as well as other types of excessive spending. To better understand the determinants of the CBD and to contribute to a more effective preventative intervention, more study is required.

**Keywords:** Compulsive buying disorder; Childhood trauma; Depression; Anxiety; Treatments

## Introduction

Almost a century ago, Emil Kraepelin defined compulsive buying disorder as an impulsive disorder [1]. Afterward, it was put into the 3rd edition of the Statistical and diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders (Bryner, 2008). Compulsive Buying Disorder (CBD) is categorized by too much or maybe improperly controlled obsessions, desires, or perhaps actions regarding going shopping and shelling out, resulting in adverse penalties.

Individuals who suffer from compulsive buying experience continuous, overpowering cravings to purchase items. The majority of the products are inexpensive and useless [2]. Compulsive buying is frequently motivated by feelings of anxiety,

severe depression, or low self-esteem [3]. Those who have compulsive buying disorder frequently meet the criteria for additional psychological problems such as ADHD, borderline personality, temperament issues, material use issues, consuming issues, difficulties in emotion-regulation, negative mental health, and various other types of desire management disorders [4].

Having anxiety, depression, and obsession-compulsion symptoms, and employing the passive-avoidance coping strategies of problem avoidance, wishful thinking, and self-criticism were all risk factors for compulsive buying, while employing the active coping strategies of problem solving and cognitive restructuring were protective factors [5].

### **The association between Compulsive Buying Disorder and depression, anxiety, binge eating, and substance use disorder**

It has been demonstrated that compulsive buyers have much greater rates of depression, substance abuse, anxiety, binge eating, and challenges with impulse control [6]. It is uncommon for the disorder to emerge after the age of thirty. The onset age is often early adulthood [7]. Male and female compulsive purchasers did not vary in terms of issue severity as measured by the Compulsive Buying Scale, according to a study including 171 compulsive buyers [8]. Multiple addictions, including drug abuse and gambling addiction, are associated with compulsive buying [9].

The diagnosis requires evidence of significant personal distress or dysfunction in social, financial, or occupational domains. According to Müller et al. [10], the compulsive purchasing disease is characterized by a focus on the shopping procedure rather than the thing purchased. Compulsive buying is characterized by a strong need to purchase, frequent lack of control over spending, financial difficulties, and the unpleasant emotional state that arises from not purchasing [10].

The behavior of compulsive buying is linked to having minimal impulse control. There is a widespread misconception that learning to control one's desires and behaviors throughout adolescence is a relatively simple and uncomplicated process. Shopaholics, on the other hand, are preoccupied with satisfying their desires, most notably those that involve the acquisition of a material good. These wants are all enticing and overwhelming [11].

### **The association between Compulsive Buying Disorder and self-blaming feelings**

Frequently, the act of shopping induces feelings of self-blame, embarrassment, and anger. To the extent where buying may become excessive, the compulsive shopper becomes secretive and conceals the stuff they have purchased, or even steals by purchasing expensive and needless foods [12]. Compulsive buying disorder contains negative feelings. Shopping compulsively is an effort to fill an emotional emptiness, such as loneliness, a lack of control, or a loss of self-esteem. An impulse to shop is frequently triggered by a bad feeling, such as an argument or dissatisfaction. However, the decrease in negative feelings is just brief, and it is quickly followed by an increase in worry or guilt [13].

Self-blame is linked to the compulsive buying disorder. Researchers discovered that obsessive buyers blame themselves more than others when they reflect on their purchases. For purchases which they view as excessive, obsessive consumers are more guilty and irresponsible than others. Products designed to demonstrate high status are one of the types of purchases that cause obsessive purchasers to be disappointed. Thus, obsessive

purchasers indicate that they spend on material objects that they believe will improve their social position, particularly highly visible items to highlight their appearance or otherwise express richness, and that they feel terrible about having spent the money [14].

Compulsive buyers exhibit indications of inadequacy. They are prone to feeling uneasy and may want to compensate for this with worldly possessions [15,16]. Compulsive buyers also tend to view their bodies as ugly and otherwise inadequate. Gudnadottir and Gardarsdottir (2014) discovered that compulsive buying is associated with feeling that the ideal woman's body is slim, as well as dissatisfaction with their own bodies and continuous dieting. Compulsive buying was associated with idealizing strong bodies, and efforts to gain muscle mass in males.

### **The association between Compulsive Buying Disorder and social challenges**

Compulsive buying disorder is characterized by a pattern of approval-seeking behavior. Shopaholics have a tendency to be readily swayed by the opinions of others. They are more agreeable than research respondents who aren't shoppers, which suggests that they aren't concerned and kind to other people. If they are lonely or otherwise alone, going shopping might help them connect with other people [17]. It is important to note that shopping may be a way for people who are lonely to find some connection with other people in their lives. Approval-seeking can be seen as a motivation for compulsive purchasing disorder, but it is also important to note that shopping may be a way for people to find some connection with other people in their lives.

Low self-esteem is a defining feature of compulsive buying disorder [15]. A compulsive shopper may assume that purchase is a helpful approach to boost confidence, particularly if the desired goods correspond to a mental image of the person they wish to be. A significant gap between one's self-worth and desired self-image is one of the numerous causes of shopping addiction. Consider a person who aspires to constantly be gorgeous and small, but who is out of date and overweight. Shopping appears to be a swift small indicator of the illusion's realization [18]. Occasionally, purchasing might function as a representation of the ideal individual. To feel more attractive, a woman with low self-esteem may pay greater attention to her looks and rush out to purchase clothing, cosmetics, and jewelry. Conversely, low self-esteem can emerge from shopping addiction, especially when debt exacerbates feelings of worthlessness and incompetence.

Compulsive buying disorder, on the other hand, is related with emotions of power and control. A compulsive activity entails the search of exceptional deals and the purchase of frequently needless products just because they are on sale. This form of discount may give people a false impression of control and authority over their surroundings [19].

Also, Richard J. et al. [20], found that irrational beliefs and materialism were correlated with compulsive buying. Irrational beliefs such as absolutistic requirements expressed in terms of “must’s”, “have to’s”, “ought’s”, and “should’s”. Other beliefs include: Awfulizing beliefs low frustration tolerance and global evaluation or self-downing. Materialism is the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions, such as image-based goods (i.e., clothes, shoes, appearance-related goods, and accessories)

### **The association between Compulsive Buying Disorder and Childhood Trauma**

The association between Compulsive Buying Disorder and Childhood Trauma has been explored in recent years, as research suggests a strong correlation between the two [21]. According to the findings of the research, traumatic experiences in childhood can also lead to compulsive buying behavior in adulthood (e.g., Sommer et al., 2020). Sansone et al. (2013) [22,23] aimed at determining whether or not there is a connection between traumatic experiences in childhood and compulsive shopping in adulthood among 370 females. The five types of childhood trauma that were investigated by researchers were being a witness to violence, experiencing physical neglect, being abused mentally, being abused physically, and being abused sexually. According to the findings of Sansone and colleagues [23], there were significant links observed between compulsive shopping behavior and the five different types of childhood trauma. The researchers came to the conclusion that the severity of the traumatic experience in childhood was directly correlated to the likelihood of developing compulsive buying behavior in adulthood.

Greenberg et al. [24], conducted a study on the problematic shopping behavior (PS) of 3,657 adolescents. The researchers came to the conclusion that there is a substantial link between problems shopping and stress, as well as aggressiveness in the form of fighting, major fighting that leads to bodily injury, and carrying weapons.

Compulsive purchasing relates to emotional deprivation as a kid, an inability to endure unpleasant sensations, the need to fill an inner emptiness - empty and longing inside, pleasure seeking, and perfectionist tendencies [25].

### **Treatment of compulsive buying disorder**

According to the researchers, they examined the published data on the pharmacological therapy of obsessive buying disorder and found that there is insufficient evidence to recommend a specific pharmacotherapy treatment for compulsive buying disorder [26].

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), for example, has been shown to be efficient in managing compulsive buying behaviors [27]. The therapist in CBT therapy attempts to uncover the antecedents of problematic shopping, to cease the activity once

the antecedents are identified, and to replace the shopping habit with more productive alternative activities. Individuals with compulsive buying behaviors are urged to chart their behavior patterns and investigate the behavior chains linked with their compulsive purchasing activity. They are urged to develop a list of essential goods and only buy those items when they go shopping. Also, they are instructed to cancel all credit accounts in order to restrict their access to disposable cash. The treatment also works on reorganizing maladaptive ideas connected with purchasing, as well as coping with the unpleasant emotional involved in compulsive buying. Additionally, the therapy contains basic information on increasing self-esteem, conflict resolution skills, and emotion regulation skills.

Similarly, research was undertaken to evaluate the efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) with person-centered experiential therapy (PCE) in the treatment of compulsive buying disorder (CBD). The frequency and length of compulsive purchase episodes decreased throughout active therapy, according to their findings. CBT and PCE were both extremely successful in decreasing shopping obsessions, enthusiasm about shopping, urge to shop, and boosting self-esteem when compared to the baseline [28]. Furthermore, Hague, Hall, & Kellett (2016) argued that group psychotherapy is now the most promising method for compulsive buying disorder [29].

Also, treating irrational beliefs could be effective in reducing anxiety and negative emotions about compulsive buyers' experiences according to Richard J. et al. [20]. That can be done through CBT. A Mitchell et al. [30] conducted a study on individuals with compulsive buying disorder and they compared 28 were allocated to CBT therapy, with 11 were placed to the waiting list control group. The group treatment comprised of 12 sessions spread out over a 10-week period. The results revealed that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) had a substantial advantage over the waiting list in terms of lowering the frequency of compulsive shopping episodes and time spent buying at the conclusion of treatment. At the 6-month follow-up, the improvement was still evident. According to the findings of this study, a cognitive behavioral intervention can be highly successful in the treatment of compulsive purchasing condition.

The group therapy is effective due to the mutual support among the participants and the therapists. According to similar conditions research, Benson, A. et al. [31], showed that a model of group therapy for compulsive buying conducted a study to test the efficacy of a group treatment model for compulsive buying disorder, the Stopping Over shopping model, which includes aspects of cognitive-behavioral and dialectical behavior therapy, psychodynamic psychotherapy, psychoeducational, motivational interviewing, acceptance and commitment therapy, and mindfulness. Results showed significant improvement on all compulsive buying tasted measures, amount of money and time spent, and number of compulsive shopping episodes. This

improvement was kept for at 6-month follow-up. The group therapy showed other positive improvements in some behaviors such as socializing, communicating, and liability with the group members. They became very connected to each other and have more social closeness and accountability. That could be detailed in another research.

## Recommendation and Future Directions

Compulsive buying may be linked to aggressive and addictive behaviors. Compulsive buying, along with stress and traumatic experiences, should be taken into account in any prevention efforts involving adolescents. Negative reinforcement and the propensity for aggressive and addictive behaviors may be linked, which suggests that further research should explore possible interventions targeting stress management and maladaptive coping strategies.

## Conclusion

When individuals are depressed, angry, anxious, or reluctant, they end up purchasing items to feel better. Mental instability and emotional swings are associated with shopping addiction. According to study, depression and anxiety are prevalent among shoppers. Shopping is frequently used to momentarily improve one's mood.

According to study, people are more compelled to buy when they are experiencing negative emotions such as anger, loneliness, disappointment, hurting feelings, and impatience. People with compulsive purchasing condition attempt to alleviate tension through purchases. According to research studies, negative emotions are the most typical predictor of compulsive buying. It has been found that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is useful for treating compulsive buying behavior.

## Declarations

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