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**A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW ON  
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COMPULSIVE DISORDER**

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# A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW ON UNDERSTANDING DEFENSE MECHANISMS IN OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER

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**Abstract:** *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a complex psychological condition characterized by intrusive thoughts and repetitive behaviors that significantly impair individuals' functioning. This study aims to explore the relationship between defense mechanisms and OCD symptoms, addressing the gap in understanding how these mechanisms contribute to maladaptive behaviors in affected individuals. Utilizing a comprehensive review methodology, the research synthesizes findings from various studies, focusing on clinical and non-clinical populations to understand the interplay between defense mechanisms, childhood experiences, and OCD manifestations. The results indicate that individuals with OCD frequently employ maladaptive defense mechanisms, such as repression and reaction formation, which correlate with the severity of their symptoms. Additionally, the presence of emotional and physical childhood trauma was found to exacerbate obsessive-compulsive traits. The findings suggest that fostering adaptive defense mechanisms may enhance treatment outcomes, highlighting the importance of integrating knowledge of defense mechanisms into therapeutic interventions. This research underscores the necessity for targeted strategies in OCD treatment thus helping individuals to develop healthier methods for coping with stress, considering both psychodynamic and psychosocial factors to improve patient quality of life and even improving clinical practice in terms of managing patients suffering from this psychiatric disorder.*

**Keywords:** *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, defense mechanisms, childhood trauma, coping strategies, psychological intervention.*

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## 1. Introduction:

OCD is a psychological disorder that is complex in nature and brings about serious disability to the affected individuals. Anxiety provoking and disturbing OCD symptoms are characterized by intrusive thoughts, urges or images which are repetitive in nature. Human beings have come up with various strategies to help them cope with the tremendous stress and anxiety that comes along with OCD. Knowing how these defense mechanisms work in relation to OCD will help researchers and practitioners design more focused treatment approaches (1). The objective of this study is to examine different defense mechanisms used by those suffering from OCD to determine what causes these maladaptive behaviors. Through understanding the intricacy of defense mechanisms in OCD, a better comprehension for this complicated disease can be made which may result in improved treatment outcomes.

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## 1.1 Overview of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a complicated mental health ailment that involves constant recurring thoughts and repetitive activities that pose an urge to perform. It is vital to comprehend the relationship between intrusive cognitions and defense mechanisms in OCD to be able to develop effective treatment strategies (2) (1). A study done by (1) brings out the connection between defense mechanisms and intrusive cognitions among patients suffering from OCD, indicating that these patterns need to be recognized in both clinical as well as non-clinical populations. Moreover, (3) draws attention to a wider spectrum of problematic internet use which includes compulsive behaviors like those seen among individuals with OCD. By including these considerations on how defenses might contribute towards symptomatic presentations as well as treatment approaches for people living with obsessive-compulsive disorder, we gain insights into a more comprehensive understanding of OCD. This research facilitates broader comprehension of OCD and has implications for targeted interventions geared at addressing intricate interplay between defense mechanisms and intrusive thoughts among individuals with the ailment.

## 2. Defense Mechanisms in Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

The relationship between defense mechanisms and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is an area of study that is always attracting a lot of concern and research. Problems associated with internet usage can range from repetitive impairing behaviors to compulsions as observed in OCD (3). The comprehension on how individuals afflicted by OCD apply defensive mechanisms to handle obsessions and compulsions is vital for effective treatment approaches. Similarly, a study related to Personality traits and disorders in childhood (4) underlines the importance of preventing early childhood personality patterns or disorders, this indicates that developmentally poor defense mechanisms could be the root causes behind abnormal development seen in persons with OCD. From these insights it becomes clear that exploring developmental as well as clinical perspectives on this mental disorder form an integral part of understanding it fully.

### 2.1 Definition and Explanation of Defense Mechanisms

Defense mechanisms are those structures which protect an individual from the reality of his own situations or from the demands of others. The analysis of the complex interaction between intrusive thoughts and defense responses is crucial in identifying the processes receiving an understanding of the psychiatric disorders like OCD (1). Imitating is just one of the many defense mechanisms that are employed by the human psyche to manage experiences as one goes through a day, or in other words is an element in a set of psychological techniques or processes that serve to maintain the conscious defenses against the unpleasant manifestations of the unconscious material. These mechanisms with subterranean work repression to projection aims at helping a person to deny stimuli that bring about anxiety (1). As a result, the question arises of how defense mechanisms interact with such intrusive thoughts and compulsions that cause a serious degree of impairment in ADLs in OCD. Indeed, from the discussion above about addiction and legal and scientific recognition of behavior, one gets a glimpse of how individuals are held legally responsible for their actions in view of their genetic makeup. Learning about defense mechanisms contributes to our knowledge regarding OCD not only on a psychological level but also on an entirely different level that concerns legal and social aspects of mental illness.

**2.1.1 Influence of Defense Mechanisms on Obsessive-Compulsive disorder:** Defense mechanisms can be seen to greatly contribute to how Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is manifested

and developed. It would be important for clinicians to better understand how the defense mechanisms impact the expression of the OCD symptoms. Research information indicates that identification of specific defense mechanisms that can be targeted in intervention for OCD treatment results in enhanced treatment carrier outcomes. According to studies, treatment of PTSD which entails regulation of defense mechanisms could be useful in the treatment of OCD. According to (Personality traits and disorders in childhood (4), Children personality patterns may predispose them to develop OCD and hence the importance of early interventions. Also, (3) reveal the shortage of the subsequent studies on the clinical tool's validation and the socio-health-economical effects of the problematic internet, linked to OCD behaviors. Thus, clinicians are better positioned to improve treatment outcomes and patient well-being by integrating knowledge from all these studies concerning the relationship of defense mechanisms and OCD.

### 3. Relationship between Defense Mechanisms and OCD Symptoms

Studies that explain the interactions between the defense systems and symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) are important to understand the nature of this condition.

This led (5) to analyze the correlation between various degrees of efficacy and different alterations of the psychological defense mechanisms of the patients; with a follow, up of 4-year showing that the only notable change observed was the reduction of utilization of the concept of "reaction formation". This was mainly reflected in the "sublimation" factor, the score of which was higher, and the difference was very significant. Thus, an abnormal kind of psychological defense mechanism contributes to the development of OCD, and the basal level of a mature defense mechanism is positively correlated with the treatment outcome.

In another study by (6) which compare of the beliefs and defense mechanism in patients with obsessive compulsive disorder and normal regarding to the Obsessive-Compulsive Belgian checklist. in this study he observed that normal people and obsessive-compulsive disorder patients where opposite in their irrational beliefs and defense mechanism. Obsessive compulsive disorder sufferers utilize defense mechanisms more often in order to reduce their levels of anxiety and in order to maintain their ego. Some of the defense mechanisms commonly used by individuals with obsessive compulsive disorder are; neutrality, denial, withdrawal, regression, spouling, rationalization and sublimation.

The cross-sectional study (7) focused on the mediating effects of personality traits and mode of defense on relationship between childhood trauma and obsessive-compulsive symptoms in OCD patients. Hence, there are more differences between the present OCD patients and normal people in terms of emotional and physical childhood history, personality abnormality of neuroticism, extraverted and conscientiousness. The defense mechanisms they employ are usually immature ones. The above aspects cause changes in immature defense through neuroticism and in the end, it impacts the obsessive-compulsive symptom.

As (8) interpersonal ambivalence in persons with OCD is seen as covert aggression, elevated responsibility, guilt and inverse reaction formations. The analysis of the findings revealed that high degrees of interpersonal ambivalence were reported by those with obsessive-compulsive disorders and especially guilt and excessive feelings of responsibility which may be a reverse to reaction formation mechanisms; On this defense mechanism, the subject drifts into the direct opposite of the impulses and behaviors such as extreme ethics and exaggerated responsibility and these were found to predict obsessive-compulsive symptoms.

In the context of OCD, intrusive cognition is defined as thoughts that spontaneously and persistently occur and are unwelcome and beyond the patient's control in (1), with the use of appropriate statistical tests, it was found that intrusive cognition significantly correlated with defense mechanism in clinical population. This correlation supports the possibility that defense mechanisms play some part in the development of OCD symptoms. In addition, (1) recommend treatments of posttraumatic stress disorder, which, due to the focus on defense mechanisms, may be effective in OCD treatment. Furthermore, the problematic use of the internet speaks of the difficulties arising from the excessive use of the internet, which is likened to compulsive behaviors of OCD.

As it has been pointed out by (9) mobilization of defense mechanisms occurs when the conflicted experience fails to attain the feared consequence regarding the trauma. There are two components in S. Freud's original model: the theory of trauma as the cause of neurosis. The neurosis in the view of this theory is rooted in the inability of the individual to adequately manage the effect that has developed in response to trauma. Additionally, (9) argued that Neurotic defense mechanisms including repression, displacement, reaction formation amongst others and other defenses including Intellectualization, Isolation, rationalization, undoing and magical thinking become active and have direct association in relation to the symptoms of numerous disorders.

Following the study (10) the relationship between defense mechanisms and psychiatric symptoms, and especially OCD was described as reciprocally related. In this study, greater symptoms are related to Maladaptive defenses such as; maladaptive action, image distorting, self-sacrificing while lower symptom severity is related to mature defenses. Consequently, the findings show higher efficiency of more mature defense mechanisms when patients' OCD symptoms are reduced after the application of behavior therapy approaches. In general, Obsessive-compulsive and depressive symptoms in patients decreased and the frequency of healthier defensibility in patients also increased with the patients who used humor, altruism and sublimation. Moreover, when one of the less adaptable defense mechanisms specific to OCD (namely, undoing) studied separately was discovered the rate turned out to be statistically significant. In as much as this research has shown that personalities bear elements of traits and that they are stable, the results call into question the assumptions of personality as trait determined and fixed.

Continuous obsessive thoughts and compulsions merely display signs of defense (11) identified OCD individuals' defense profile when compared to 31 matched clinical and non-clinical controls on the Defense Mechanism Test. In this study, it was noted that Reaction Formation and one of the subclasses of Isolation (Barrier Isolation) were closely related to the obsessive-compulsive diagnosis.

In summary, the selected papers enhance our understanding of OCD by exploring the psychological, developmental, and clinical aspects of defense mechanisms in relation to the disorder. They also suggest directions for future research and the development of therapeutic approaches that could address these defense mechanisms more effectively.

#### **4. Objective of the study**

The objective of the study is to find out the relationship between Defense mechanism and obsessive-compulsive disorder in the existing literature through a systematic review. The present study aims to explore and compare the effects of primary defense mechanisms on obsessive-compulsive disorder.

#### **5. Critical Review**

The above research has highlighted the relationship and correlation between defense mechanisms and OCD. How an abnormal psychological defense mechanism plays an important role in OCD, and the use of a mature defense mechanism is significantly related to the treatment efficacy. And highlighted people who suffer obsessive compulsive disorder use defense mechanisms more frequently to decrease anxiety and to preserve their ego. It was also found that OCD patients have experienced more emotional and physical childhood trauma, and have abnormal personality traits of neuroticism, extraversion and conscientiousness. Another study says, high interpersonal ambivalence exists among people with obsessive-compulsive disorders particularly feelings of guilt and excessive responsibility which is a reverse reaction formation mechanism. Further, treatments aimed at managing posttraumatic stress disorder, which may involve addressing defense mechanisms, could be beneficial in treating OCD. Neurotic defense mechanisms like repression, displacement, reaction formation, and various kinds of defenses such as intellectualisation, isolation, rationalization, undoing, and magical thinking comes into play and positively correlate in symptom formation of various disorder. Reaction Formation and one variant of Isolation (Barrier Isolation)

were significantly associated with the obsessive-compulsive diagnosis. The studies also explored how adverse early childhood experiences such as parental neglect, mother–father conflict, and lack of parental love and care leading to fixation in psychosexual stages of development, which further leads to the adoption of maladaptive defense mechanisms that in turn further contribute to the development of obsessional personality traits.

The studies focused completely on maladaptive defense mechanisms, early childhood experiences, psychosexual fixations in childhood, post traumatic stress but ignored other factors such as Behavioral, Cognitive and Emotional regulation factors that might also play an integral role in the development of OCD. Furthermore, the studies didn't examine the biological pathway and neurotransmitters that would hold a foundational role behind understanding the use of certain defenses that led to development of OCD and various other conditions. Also, the studies didn't take into account other Psychosocial aspects- loss of loved ones, change of environment due to job or shifting of home, pregnancy challenges, exposure to filthy environmental conditions, fear of infestation, outbreak of virus, epidemic, that could have contributed in gaining a more holistic understanding of the disorder. Furthermore, exploration into comorbid conditions such as Bipolar disorder where OCD arises as a secondary conditions to primary one, and Schizo-obsessive disorders where both paranoia, delusions, hallucinations along with obsessive thoughts and compulsive rituals goes hand in hand would have devolved in understanding what lies in the core of such symptom and helping understand the spectrum of OCD.

## 6. Method

The study involved a systematic review of relevant literature to analyze and understand the role of defense mechanisms in OCD ,we can infer that the research involves a review of existing literature, mix of empirical studies, theoretical discussions on the topic including studies and articles that have explored the relationship between defense mechanisms and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

Based on the provided study excerpts, the literature review included several papers, each from different years from (2010, 2018, 2020, and 2022.) It included

**Longitudinal Studies:** The study mentions a four-year follow-up study by Wang (5), which suggests that longitudinal research was used to track changes in defense mechanisms and OCD symptoms over time.

**Comparative Analysis:** The study by Hamidi & Motlagh (2010) (6) compared the defense mechanisms and irrational beliefs of OCD patients with those of normal individuals, indicating a comparative approach.

**Correlational Studies:** The research identified correlations between the use of defense mechanisms and the severity of OCD symptoms, as well as the efficacy of treatment.

**Psychodynamic and Psychosocial Analysis:** The review considered psychodynamic and psychosocial factors, such as childhood trauma and personality traits, to understand their impact on the development of OCD and the use of defense mechanisms.

**Clinical Observations:** The study refers to clinical evaluations and diagnoses, suggesting that observations from clinical settings were also part of the research.

**Statistical Analysis:** The studies would have likely used statistical methods to analyze the data and determine the significance of the findings.

**Theoretical Frameworks:** The research appears to have been guided by theoretical frameworks that explain the role of defense mechanisms in psychological disorders.

The study also references other sources, such as "Addiction, Genetics, and Criminal Responsibility" and "Psychodynamic Perspective of Sexual Obsessions in Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder" (12)

These methods have been used to collect, analyze, and interpret data to test the hypothesis that defense mechanisms are significantly related to the development, persistence, and treatment of OCD. The combination of these methods allowed us to draw conclusions about the complex interplay between defense mechanisms and OCD symptoms.

## 7. Results And Discussion

The study presents a comprehensive review of the literature on defense mechanisms in Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), aiming to understand the underlying reasons behind maladaptive behaviors in individuals with OCD. The review highlights several key findings and discussions:

**Relationship between Defense Mechanisms and OCD:** The review underscores the significant relationship between defense mechanisms and OCD symptoms. (14) It suggests that abnormal psychological defense mechanisms contribute to the development and persistence of OCD, while the use of mature defense mechanisms is positively correlated with treatment efficacy.

**Role of Specific Defense Mechanisms:** The study identifies specific defense mechanisms such as repression, displacement, reaction formation, intellectualization, isolation, rationalization, undoing, and magical thinking as being commonly used by individuals with OCD. These mechanisms are associated with the formation of OCD symptoms.

**Changes in Defense Mechanisms Over Time:** A four-year follow-up study (5) found that a reduction in the use of "reaction formation" and an increase in "sublimation" were significantly associated with improvements in OCD symptoms, indicating that changes in defense mechanisms can correlate with changes in OCD severity.

**Childhood Trauma and Personality Traits:** The review discusses the impact of childhood trauma and abnormal personality traits, such as neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness, on the development of OCD. (13) It suggests that early adverse experiences can predispose individuals to the adoption of maladaptive defense mechanisms and the development of obsessional personality traits.

**Treatment Implications:** The review suggests that treatments targeting defense mechanisms, particularly those related to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), could be beneficial in treating OCD.

**Interpersonal Ambivalence:** High interpersonal ambivalence, characterized by feelings of guilt and excessive responsibility, was found among people with OCD, suggesting a reverse reaction formation mechanism.(15) (4) This finding supports the hypothesis that complex defense mechanisms are at play in OCD.

In summary, the review provides a detailed analysis of the complex interplay between defense mechanisms and OCD, offering insights into the development of the disorder and suggesting directions for future research and treatment strategies. The study's results are consistent with existing theories that emphasize the role of defense mechanisms in the development and treatment of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). The findings align with psychoanalytic theories, particularly those of Sigmund Freud, which suggest that defense mechanisms are psychological strategies employed by individuals to protect themselves from unconscious conflicts and anxiety. The results of the study on defense mechanisms in Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) support the hypothesis that defense mechanisms play a significant role in the development, persistence, and treatment of OCD. The study confirms that individuals with OCD use defense mechanisms more frequently to reduce anxiety and maintain their ego, which is in line with the psychoanalytic understanding of how defense mechanisms operate. Furthermore, the study's findings regarding the relationship between childhood trauma, personality traits, and the development of OCD are congruent with theories that consider early life experiences as formative in the development of psychological defenses and personality disorders. The study also notes the potential benefit of treatments targeting defense mechanisms, such as those for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), in the treatment of OCD. This is consistent with theories that view trauma as a root cause of neurosis and suggest that addressing defense mechanisms can alleviate symptoms.

In summary, the study's results are well-integrated with existing psychoanalytic and trauma-based theories, providing empirical support for the theoretical constructs that have long posited a central role for defense mechanisms in psychological disorders like OCD.

## 8. Conclusion

Altogether, the above few researches have enlightened a complex interplay of defense mechanisms and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Analyzing the range of defense mechanisms used by people with OCD from repression to isolation, we were able to better define the role of defense mechanisms to keep in-securities and conflicts beyond the conscious level. However, it is significant to note that such defense mechanisms as adaptive ones might predispose to the OCD symptoms' persistence in the long term. In particular, the changes in the level of defense mechanisms from maladaptive to more adaptive have been recently reported to correlate with the changes in OCD severity, which underscores the significance of this finding in clinical work. And how greater use of more adaptive defense mechanisms when a patient's OCD symptoms diminish after the application of behavior therapy techniques. And how the personality of a person is deeply entwined with childhood and how one is shaped by one's environment and relations. and that early adverse childhood experience predisposes to fixation in the psychosexual stage of development. It is essential to understand how the early experiences with the attached figures impact one's relation to and experience of the present, and how the past can help explain psychological problems at present. An understanding of the interactions between defense mechanisms and OCD may provide useful information regarding more specific patterns of action and work that needs to be done in order to influence the OCD patient and improve their quality of life.

## 9. Implication And Future Directions

The above study is limited to the role of defense mechanisms in OCD, but the study did not take into account the age, gender, socio-economic status, family type, religion beliefs, regional aspects. That is why there is a necessity to develop therapeutic approaches which could address these patterns of defense and enable people to form more adaptive mechanisms. It is still, therefore, important to practice counseling its early intervention in any life crises that may be serving the individual a fate of developing maladaptive defenses.

Further studies could be aimed at examining the efficacy of the treatments targeting particular defense mechanisms in persons already developed OCD, and consequently enhance the rates of treatment success and quality of life of such sufferers of this restrictive disease.

This understanding also makes it possible to extend research into and application of psychodynamic and psychosocial models for OCD management to open up new ways of treatment in this area.

The understanding of the nature and the extent of the OCD behaviors and their socio-health-economic consequences as well as the identification of the applicability of the speaking easy scoring system to other clinical tools make it clear that further studies are required to validate tools and the established relationships.

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