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Mental Health and Performance: An Analytical Study on OCD and Employee Output

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ABSTRACT:

Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder (OCD) significantly affects workplace productivity and employee performance. This study employs secondary research to analyse global and Indian data, peer-reviewed literature, and organizational reports from 2014–2024 to understand how OCD impacts efficiency, task completion, and engagement. Findings indicate that compulsive behaviours, cognitive overload, and intrusive thoughts reduce task completion rates and increase absenteeism and presenteeism. Middle-aged, highly educated professionals in structured, precision-driven roles are most affected. Organizations with mental health inclusion policies, Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), and flexible work designs report improved employee retention and engagement. The study recommends HR interventions, awareness campaigns, leadership sensitization, and regular mental health screenings to mitigate OCD-related productivity loss.

Keywords: OCD, workplace productivity, employee performance, mental health, HR interventions

Introduction:

Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a chronic mental health condition characterized by the presence of intrusive, unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive, ritualistic behaviours (compulsions) performed to alleviate anxiety. These symptoms can significantly interfere with daily functioning, social interactions, and workplace performance. In professional environments, employees affected by OCD often experience heightened cognitive load, impaired concentration, and inefficiencies in task execution, despite often striving for high standards of quality.

The workplace is a context where mental health plays a pivotal role in determining individual and organizational productivity. While the importance of general mental health awareness has been increasingly recognized, specific focus on OCD remains limited, particularly in developing economies such as India. Individuals with OCD may demonstrate over-attentiveness to detail, excessive checking, ordering, and cleaning behaviours, which can paradoxically reduce productivity, increase fatigue, and delay project timelines. Moreover, OCD is frequently associated with comorbid conditions such as anxiety, depression, and stress, which further amplify its impact on professional efficiency.

Several studies have suggested that OCD contributes to both absenteeism (missing work due to psychological distress) and presenteeism (reduced performance while at work), leading to a measurable loss in organizational output. According to the World Health Organization (2023), untreated mental health conditions, including OCD, are responsible for billions of dollars in lost productivity globally, highlighting the economic relevance of addressing this issue. Similarly, Statista (2024) reports that approximately 3–3.5% of working professionals worldwide exhibit OCD symptoms that impair workplace functioning.

Despite these challenges, organizations that implement mental health-friendly policies, provide access to counselling and therapy through Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), and promote awareness and empathy among leadership, demonstrate improved employee retention, engagement, and performance consistency. Recognizing the impact of OCD is therefore not only critical for employee well-being but also essential for sustaining organizational efficiency and economic growth.

This study seeks to examine how OCD affects workplace productivity, analyse demographic and occupational patterns of its prevalence, and propose actionable HR strategies to support affected employees. By leveraging secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, organizational reports, and global datasets, this paper aims to provide evidence-based insights into the cognitive and behavioural mechanisms through which OCD impairs performance, as well as practical recommendations to foster inclusive and efficient workplaces.

Objectives of the Study:

To review literature about how OCD affects employee productivity and performance.

To identify cognitive and behavioural patterns of OCD that impede workplace outcomes.

To analyse demographic, occupational, and symptom-based patterns of OCD among employees.

To propose HR strategies and interventions supportive of employees with OCD.

To highlight the economic and organizational significance of addressing OCD in the workplace.

Research Methodology:

Research Design

The present study employs a descriptive and analytical secondary research design, aimed at examining the connection between Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and employee performance across professional settings. This design enables the synthesis of quantitative and qualitative data from credible secondary sources, providing a comprehensive understanding of how OCD influences productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational outcomes.

The research emphasizes a data-driven approach, relying on cross-referenced findings from international studies, meta-analyses, and institutional reports. Statistical data on workplace mental health were extracted primarily from Statista (2024), World Health Organization (WHO), and National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) repositories to identify measurable trends in employee absenteeism, concentration loss, and task efficiency among individuals exhibiting OCD-related behaviours.

Sample and Sample Selection

The sample comprises a total of 39 secondary sources, including 30 peer-reviewed academic journal articles, 5 organizational and industry health reports, and 4 globally recognized data repositories. These materials were carefully selected using inclusion criteria based on

Relevance: The source must specifically address OCD, workplace performance, or mental health in occupational settings.

Credibility: Only peer-reviewed journals, institutional reports, and government or international agency data were included.

Recency: Publications were selected from the period 2014–2024 to ensure data accuracy and contemporary relevance.

Geographic diversity: Studies from India, the United States, and Europe were prioritized to provide both global and regional perspectives

Among the selected sources, approximately 65% were quantitative studies, 25% qualitative, and 10% mixed-method analyses, ensuring a balanced representation of data interpretations.

Data Collection Tools

Data were obtained through comprehensive digital searches on academic and statistical databases, including Google Scholar, PubMed, ScienceDirect, Statista, SpringerLink, and ResearchGate. The search utilized Boolean combinations of targeted keywords such as:

- “*ObsessiveCompulsive Disorder AND workplace productivity*”
- “*OCD AND employee performance*”
- “*Mental health disorders AND organizational efficiency*”
- “*Workplace accommodations for OCD employees*”

The collected literature and datasets were categorized using content analysis to identify recurring behavioural themes, cognitive patterns, and HR challenges associated with OCD in professional environments. Quantitative data (e.g., absenteeism rates, productivity loss percentages) were extracted from large-scale surveys reported by Statista, WHO, and Harvard Business Review articles on workplace mental health.

For instance, according to Statista (2023), approximately 3.6% of the global workforce experiences productivity impairment linked to anxiety and OCD-related symptoms, while WHO (2022) estimates an annual economic productivity loss of over USD 1 trillion globally due to untreated mental health conditions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to evaluate and interpret existing evidence regarding how OCD symptoms, such as intrusive thoughts, perfectionism, and compulsive behaviours, affect employee productivity, engagement, and efficiency. The study aims to bridge theoretical understanding with real-world data, emphasizing measurable impacts like task delays, cognitive fatigue, and decreased performance consistency.

Additionally, the research seeks to identify human resource management strategies that promote inclusivity and performance optimization for employees dealing with OCD. The ultimate goal is to inform organizational policy design, guide mental wellness programs, and support the integration of evidence-based interventions to foster healthy and productive work environments.

Review of Literature

The relationship between Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and workplace performance has gained increasing scholarly and organizational attention in the past decade. OCD is characterized by recurrent intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviours or mental rituals (compulsions) that can disrupt concentration, time management, and task execution. According to the World Health Organization (2023), approximately 2–3% of the global adult population suffers from OCD, with an estimated 35–40% reporting significant work-related impairment due to the disorder.

Global Studies

A study by Abramowitz & Jacoby (2015) emphasized that individuals with OCD experience elevated levels of anxiety and perfectionism, which contribute to task delays and reduced flexibility in dynamic work environments. Similarly, Stein et al. (2019) found that OCD symptoms significantly reduce job satisfaction and increase absenteeism rates, noting that affected employees often spend up to 10% more time rechecking or redoing tasks compared to unaffected peers.

The Harvard Business Review (2022) reported that organizations that fail to recognize and accommodate OCD-related challenges risk losing nearly 15–20% of employee productivity annually, particularly in high-pressure roles requiring precision and time-sensitive outputs. Complementarily, Statista (2024) data indicate that mental health-related absenteeism, including OCD-related causes, accounts for 12.4% of total lost work hours across global corporations.

Indian Context

In the Indian context, research on OCD in workplace settings remains limited but evolving. Sharma & Rao (2020) observed that OCD prevalence among Indian professionals stands at around 2.1%, yet only one-third of affected employees seek professional treatment due to stigma or lack of workplace support. The National Mental Health Survey of India (2022) further revealed that mental health-related productivity loss costs Indian employers nearly ₹1.1 trillion annually, underscoring the economic impact of under-addressed psychological disorders.

Cognitive and Behavioural Dimensions

Cognitive-behavioural frameworks explain that perfectionism and fear of failure — hallmark traits of OCD — may paradoxically enhance output quality but reduce efficiency. Employees with obsessive ordering or checking tendencies exhibit above-average accuracy but noticeably poorer completion rates (Frost & Steketee, 2017). These tendencies are consistent with the cognitive model of Clark and Radomsky (2020), which associates intrusive doubt with repeated task verification, frequently leading to mental fatigue and decreased creativity at work.

Organizational and HR Perspectives

From a human resources perspective, Cooper & Quick (2018) highlighted the importance of psychological safety and wellness programs in sustaining productivity among employees with mental health conditions. Evidence suggests that organizations with structured Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and flexible work policies report a 25% improvement in retention among staff managing OCD and related disorders.

Moreover, a survey by Deloitte India (2023) found that nearly 80% of employees with recurring anxiety or obsessive symptoms felt more supported when HR managers demonstrated empathy and implemented non-punitive performance reviews. However, less than 35% of Indian companies have formal guidelines for managing mental health concerns at work.

Summary of Reviewed Literature

Overall, reviewed studies consistently affirm that OCD negatively influences employee efficiency, particularly through excessive perfectionism, compulsive verification, and cognitive overload. The literature further establishes a strong correlation between mental health support frameworks and improved organizational performance metrics. Despite global advancements, India's corporate and institutional sectors still face significant gaps in mental health inclusivity and policy design, creating scope for applied HR interventions and evidence-based wellness strategies.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis in this study is entirely based on secondary data derived from global and Indian databases, academic journals, and institutional reports published between 2014–2024. The goal is to interpret how Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder (OCD) influences employee productivity across various demographic, occupational, and psychological classifications.

4.1 Demographic Analysis

According to the World Health Organization (2023) and Statista (2024), OCD affects approximately 3.1% of the global working-age population. When distributed demographically:

Gender: Women are found to exhibit slightly higher prevalence (3.5%) than men (2.8%), though symptom intensity does not differ significantly (NIMH, 2023).

Age: The majority of diagnosed employees fall within the 25–40 age bracket (52%), typically representing early- to mid-career professionals. Younger employees (below 25) report milder symptoms but higher anxiety-related absenteeism.

Education: Professionals with postgraduate qualifications showed a higher tendency toward perfectionism and obsessive work patterns (approx. 38%) than those with undergraduate degrees (27%), suggesting that high academic achievement correlates with obsessive performance standards.

Geographic distribution: Developed economies report greater diagnosis rates (4–5%), whereas underdiagnosis in developing countries like India keeps the reported rate around 1.8–2.2% (Sharma & Rao, 2020).

4.2 Classification by Occupational Sector

Occupational Sector	OCD Prevalence (%)	Average Productivity Impact (%)	Key Observed Behaviour
IT and Technical Services	3.6	15	Rechecking of code, fear of minor errors
Healthcare and Pharma	2.9	18	Compulsive sanitation, excessive verification
Education and Academia	3.2	12	Perfectionism in grading or reporting
Finance and Accounting	4.1	20	Repetitive data validation, fear of miscalculation
Manufacturing	1.7	10	Repetitive checking of machinery/processes
Creative/Media	2.4	9	Over-editing, fear of imperfection in output

(Sources: Statista 2024, WHO 2023, HBR 2022, Deloitte Mental Health Survey 2023)

This table highlights that finance and IT sectors report the highest impact on productivity due to the precision-demanding nature of work, which amplifies obsessive thought cycles and verification behaviours.

4.3 Psychological Classification and Symptom-Based Interpretation

Based on DSM-5 and reviewed studies, OCD symptoms can be classified into four major dimensions, each affecting productivity differently:

Type of OCD Symptom	Core Behaviour	Work Impact	Example in Workplace Context
Checking Type	Repeated verification to avoid mistakes	Delays, reduced task completion rate	Employee repeatedly rechecks reports or emails
Contamination Type	Fear of germs or unclean environments	Avoidance of shared spaces, absenteeism	Excessive sanitizing, difficulty in teamwork
Symmetry/Ordering Type	Need for perfect arrangement or precision	Time overrun, cognitive rigidity	Spending extra time formatting documents
Intrusive Thoughts Type	Recurrent, distressing thoughts	Distractibility, poor focus	Mental fatigue during prolonged tasks

According to NIMH (2022), *checking* and *ordering* subtypes are most prevalent among working professionals, accounting for over 60% of OCD-related workplace impairments.

4.4 Cognitive and Behavioural Interpretation

Secondary data analysis indicates that employees with OCD demonstrate higher attention to detail but significantly lower adaptability in dynamic or ambiguous work settings. Even though accuracy scores increased by up to 12 percent, Frost & Steketee (2017) found that job completion durations increased by 30 to 40 percent, which directly affected workflow efficiency.

Furthermore, intrusive doubt leads to repetitive reassessment, which takes up about 2.5 extra work hours per week for OCD-affected employees in comparison to their peers, according to Clark & Radomsky (2020).

4.5 Interpretation Summary

The analysis establishes that OCD impacts productivity through three main pathways:

1. Behavioural repetition — leading to time inefficiency.
2. Cognitive rigidity — reducing innovation and adaptability.
3. Anxiety-induced fatigue — lowering concentration and overall work quality.

Demographic and occupational breakdowns reveal that middle-aged, highly educated professionals in structured, precision-driven roles (e.g., finance, IT, academia) are most vulnerable to OCD-related performance issues. The evidence collectively underscores the need for customized HR interventions, mental wellness frameworks, and organizational awareness training to minimize productivity loss and support employee wellbeing.

Findings of the Study

Reduced Productivity: OCD leads to a measurable decline in employee productivity due to cognitive overload, repetitive behaviors, and intrusive thoughts. Employees affected by checking, ordering, or contamination compulsions spend 10–20% additional time on routine tasks, reducing efficiency.

Behavioural Impacts: Compulsions such as constant checking, cleaning, or seeking reassurance directly impair task completion speed and can negatively affect output quality. While OCD can improve attention to detail, it often comes at the cost of time management and adaptability.

Demographic and Occupational Insights: Middle-aged (25–40 years), highly educated professionals in structured, precision-driven sectors such as finance, IT, healthcare, and academia are most vulnerable to productivity loss. Symptom types like checking and ordering account for over 60% of workplace impairment.

Organizational Factors: Workplaces with low mental health awareness exacerbate OCD-related inefficiency due to stigma, lack of support systems, and rigid performance expectations. Conversely, organizations that implement mental health inclusion policies, such as flexible scheduling, counselling access, and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), report 15–25% higher performance consistency, better retention, and enhanced engagement.

Economic Impact: OCD-related inefficiency contributes to both absenteeism and presenteeism. Globally, untreated OCD and related mental health conditions result in over USD 1 trillion in lost productivity annually, while in India, workplace mental health challenges, including OCD, are associated with ₹1.1 trillion annual economic loss (WHO, 2022; Statista, 2024).

Suggestions and Recommendations

1. **HR Interventions:** Implement structured Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) providing access to counselling, therapy, and stress management workshops. Ensure confidentiality to encourage participation.
2. **Awareness and Education Campaigns:** Conduct workplace seminars, webinars, and workshops to reduce stigma surrounding OCD and other mental health conditions, fostering a culture of empathy and support.
3. **Flexible Work Design:** Introduce adaptable schedules, workload management strategies, and remote work options for affected employees to minimize stress and improve productivity.
4. **Leadership Sensitization:** Train managers to recognize early mental health distress signals and respond empathetically, integrating mental health considerations into performance reviews.
5. **Regular Assessments and Screening:** Incorporate mental health screening into annual wellness programs to identify early symptoms and implement proactive interventions.
6. **Policy Integration:** Update HR policies to include mental health protection clauses, ensuring confidentiality, non-discrimination, and structured support for employees with OCD and other psychological conditions.
7. **Data-Driven Monitoring:** Use analytics from employee wellness surveys and productivity metrics to continuously assess effectiveness of interventions, allowing policy refinement and targeted support.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant impact of Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder (OCD) on employee productivity and organizational performance. Through a comprehensive secondary analysis of peer-reviewed articles, organizational reports, and global datasets, it is evident that OCD affects cognitive functioning, task completion efficiency, and overall workplace engagement.

The findings demonstrate that compulsions such as constant checking, ordering, or reassurance-seeking lead to measurable productivity loss, particularly in high-precision, structured occupations such as finance, IT, healthcare, and academia. While OCD may enhance attention to detail, it often reduces adaptability, increases task completion time, and contributes to both absenteeism and presenteeism. Demographic patterns indicate that middle-aged, highly educated professionals are disproportionately affected, underscoring the need for targeted interventions.

Organizational practices play a critical role in mitigating these effects. Workplaces with mental health inclusion policies, Employee Assistance Programs, flexible work design, and leadership sensitization show improved employee retention, engagement, and performance consistency. Furthermore, awareness campaigns and regular mental health screenings can reduce stigma, encourage help-seeking behavior, and enable early intervention.

In conclusion, addressing OCD in the workplace is both a moral and economic imperative. Organizations that proactively implement data-driven mental health strategies not only support affected employees but also enhance overall productivity and organizational resilience. This study underscores the importance of integrating mental health considerations into HR policies, workplace culture, and performance management frameworks to create inclusive, empathetic, and efficient work environments.

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