

What is Scrupulosity?

A form of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) involving religious or moral obsessions. Scrupulous individuals are overly concerned that something they thought or did might be a sin or other violation of religious or moral doctrine.

What are the symptoms of scrupulosity?

Common obsessions seen in scrupulosity include excessive concerns about:

- Blasphemy
- Having committed a sin
- Behaving morally
- Purity
- Going to hell
- Death
- A loss of impulse control

Besides excessive worry about religious and moral issues, scrupulosity sufferers engage in mental or behavioral compulsions.

Behavioral compulsions could include:

- Excessive trips to confession
- Repeatedly seeking reassurance from religious leaders and loved ones
- Repeated cleansing and purifying rituals
- Acts of self-sacrifice
- Avoiding situations (for example, religious services) in which they believe a religious or moral error would be especially likely or cause something bad to happen

Mental compulsions could include:

- Excessive praying (sometimes with an emphasis on the prayer needing to be perfect)
- Repeatedly imagining sacred images or phrases
- Repeating passages from sacred scriptures in one's head
- Making pacts with God

How can scrupulosity be distinguished from normal religious practice?

Unlike normal religious practice, scrupulous behavior usually exceeds or disregards religious law and may focus excessively on one trivial area of religious practice while other, more important areas may be completely ignored. The behavior of scrupulous individuals is typically inconsistent with that of the rest of the faith community.

How common is scrupulosity?

Unfortunately this is not yet known.

Is scrupulosity more common among people of a particular faith?

Scrupulosity is an equal opportunity disorder. It can affect individuals from a variety of different faith traditions. Although more research is needed to truly answer this question, there is currently no evidence to link scrupulosity to a specific religion.

Are people with scrupulosity more or less religious than others?

OCD makes it harder to practice one's faith. However, there is no evidence that the moral or religious character of scrupulosity sufferers is any different from that of other people. Many notable religious leaders have struggled with this condition, including St. Ignatius Loyola, Martin Luther, St. Alphonsus Liguori, John Bunyan, and St. Veronica Giuliani.

What causes scrupulosity?

The exact cause of scrupulosity is not known. Like other forms of OCD, scrupulosity may be the result of several factors including genetic and environmental influences.

Can scrupulosity be treated?

Scrupulosity responds to the same treatments as those used with other forms of OCD. Cognitive behavior therapy featuring a procedure called "exposure and response prevention" is the primary psychological treatment for scrupulosity. A certain kind of medicines called Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) is the primary drug treatment for OCD. Treatment for scrupulosity may also include consultation from leaders of the patient's faith tradition.

Are other members of a person's faith community ever involved in therapy for scrupulosity?

Yes, sometimes. It depends on the preferences and needs of the individual. There are a couple of ways in which religious leaders, family members, or friends from the individual's faith community can be helpful. They may be asked to help clarify a religious institution's stance on a particular issue relevant to the scrupulosity sufferer. The therapist may also ask them to learn new ways to help support the patient's recovery process.

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