

# The impact of OCD is costing the UK more than £5 billion a year, new research reveals

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The effects of obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) create an economic burden to the U.K. totaling a staggering £5 billion, a [new study](#) titled "A cost-of-illness analysis of the economic burden of obsessive-compulsive

disorder in the United Kingdom" and published in *Comprehensive Psychiatry* has concluded.

Researchers at the University of Hertfordshire, Costello Medical and Orchard OCD conducted an in-depth study of the cost of the illness to health care providers and society—analyzing the economic impact on the NHS, Personal Social Services (PSS), people with OCD, caregivers and society at large.

While the cost to health care providers was calculated at £378 million a year, primarily driven by therapy costs, the societal cost is considerably higher, valued at £4.7 billion annually. This is largely due to people being absent from work because of the effects of the condition.

Researchers say this substantial economic burden, which extends well beyond the direct costs of treatment, highlights the urgent need for research into alternative, more effective treatments to remove the limitations of the condition.

Earlier this year, the University of Hertfordshire and Orchard OCD announced a successful feasibility study of transcranial direct current stimulation (tDCS)—a form of non-invasive brain stimulation—as a pioneering new treatment option for people with OCD. They are also encouraging individuals with OCD to [volunteer on the Orchard OCD Registry](#) and get involved in research trials, to improve the scope and efficacy of OCD research.

Professor Naomi Fineberg, professor of psychiatry at the University of Hertfordshire and consultant psychiatrist at Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, said, "Over a million people in the U.K. experience OCD at some point in their lives, and it's a widely misunderstood condition. There are a lot of assumptions about OCD, many of which don't reflect the realities of living with it—which at the

most serious end of the spectrum, can be debilitating."

The annual [economic impact](#) per person increases depending on the severity of the condition: for individuals with the most severe OCD symptoms, the [annual cost](#) to the health care provider and to society £7,526, compared to those with mild or moderate OCD (£5,849 and £6,938 respectively).

These figures comprise costs directly accrued to the health care provider and to individuals with OCD, including therapy, medication and additional expenses such as increased transport costs and the purchase of cleaning items. Indirect costs, such as lost productivity due to absence from work, are also included.

Nick Sireau, co-founder and CEO of Orchard OCD, said, "Being able to quantify the impact of OCD in economic terms helps to reinforce the argument for increased research and a wider range of treatment options. If we can reduce the impact of OCD symptoms, we could not only help individuals have better clinical and psychological outcomes, but also reduce this wider [economic burden](#)."

Despite the comprehensive study, researchers admit that this is still likely to be an underestimation of the true costs. When analysis was added on the impact of "presenteeism"—being present at work but with reduced productivity due to illness—and the secondary reduction in productivity among informal caregivers, the societal cost rose even more steeply to £10.7 billion. In addition, the study does not take into account the impact of comorbidities such as anxiety and depression, often seen alongside OCD, as well as the suspected prevalence of undiagnosed cases.

**More information:** Naman Kochar et al, A cost-of-illness analysis of the economic burden of obsessive-compulsive disorder in the United

Kingdom, *Comprehensive Psychiatry* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.comppsy.2023.152422](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.comppsy.2023.152422)

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