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SUBJECT & SECTION: MT 13 (LEC) - CD

“HAIR PULLING ADDICTION - TRICHOTILLOMANIA”

Overview

Trichotillomania (*trik-o-til-o-MAY-nee-uh*), also called hair-pulling disorder, is defined to be a mental health condition. It involves frequent, repeated and irresistible urges to pull out hair from your scalp, eyebrows or other areas of your body. (*Mayo Clinic, 2023*)

It manifests as some form of disorder or addiction and affects one's psychological health and overall health more so during the adolescent, teen and adult ages. Assessment of trichotillomania in all its manifestations – from symptoms to a person's life vision – is crucial for understanding the problems of those with this disorder and, what is more important, the effective treatment options available.

What are the symptoms of trichotillomania?

According to the *American Psychiatric Association's [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition \(DSM-5\)](#)* and [Cleveland Clinic](#), the diagnosis of TTM requires a person to meet five criteria:

1. Repeated pulling out of hair that causes hair loss.
2. Trying multiple times to stop this behavior or do it less often.
3. Feeling that hair pulling negatively affects your life, especially your work and social life.
4. The hair pulling or hair loss isn't happening because of another condition (such as a skin-related disorder or problem).
5. The hair pulling isn't happening because of another mental health condition. An example of this is body dysmorphia, where hair pulling happens because a person believes there's a problem with their appearance and is trying to fix it).

Some people with TTM pull their hair deliberately, such as when they feel a hair is out of place or looks different from others around it. Other people pull their hair automatically without thinking about it. (*Cleveland Clinic, 2022*)

- **How does this Addiction affect our Brain?**

The impact of trichotillomania on the brain varies. This is thought to stem from the deficiency in areas responsible for **impulse control**, such as the prefrontal cortex of the brain, as well as the reward circuitry of the brain itself. Hair pulling may provide the release of **dopamine**, a brain-signaling chemical associated with pleasure or relief in the very short term. Such positive reinforcement is what makes the behavior hard to break. Eventually, the brain can be trained in a way that allows only hair-pulling as a method to control stress, thus making it very hard to quit such behavior without any help.

- **How does it put people at risk?**

Trichotillomania undoubtedly poses risks to an individual in many ways. According to *(Mayo Clinic, 2022)*, The effects of trichotillomania also **depend on the age at which it happens**. Children commonly pull their hair in this way, but that behavior is often a self-soothing act that they can often grow out of. Adolescents, teenagers, and adults with this condition on the other hand, tend to have much more severe problems.

The most readily apparent effect, which is **hair loss**, may make a person susceptible to develop **infections or skin lesions** more so if the individual engages in persistent hair pulling and inflicts trauma to the skin or the hair follicles. Apart from the physical threats, psychosocial consequences may be equally or more unbearable.

- **How can it cause Depression?**

Trichotillomania can result in **guilt, shame, and even anger**. A lot of them feel hopeless about the problem since they are aware that they cannot help the constant desire to pull one's hair out, which in turn lowers their self-worth. The obvious loss of hair can bring about shame that may result in staying away from people. This can be so persistent that it gives rise to anxiety or depression. Others may become more reclusive, shunning socializing or even normal undertakings such as attending school or work which exacerbates loneliness and depression.

- **How do we treat Trichotillomania?**

Trichotillomania or hair-pulling disorder is usually treated by combining medication and therapy:

1. Behavioral Therapy: Among psychotherapies, It is the most widely practiced one. It aims at helping a person identify the triggers that result in hair pulling and find healthier ways of coping. One such technique is habit reversal training, where patients practice appropriate responses instead of pulling hair, such as squeezing a ball.

2. Medication: In few cases, medications such as antidepressants are given to control the anxiety and compulsive behavior present.

3. Support Groups: Individuals may also take part in group therapy as well as internet based support which helps in promoting understanding and motivation among the patients.

REFERENCES

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