

Shopping Addiction (Compulsive Shopping)

Shopping addiction (also known as onomanie from the Greek word “onios,” to buy) is a compulsive disorder that is characterized through repeated, episodic buying of goods or services and is a non-substance based addiction. Like gambling and work dependences, shopping addiction is categorized as a compulsive disorder, which is covered in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) in chapter F 42.X and also under impulse control disorders in chapter F63.X. For a diagnosis, it is essential that possession of goods or use of services is not the goal of the patient, but rather, that an urgent compulsion to consume drives their behaviour. The patient is aware of the senselessness of their actions but their willpower to resist is usually not strong enough to solve the problem. As in the case of other non-substance based addictions, withdrawal symptoms are experienced when the person is inhibited from their addictive behaviour either by outside forces or by their own mental strength. These symptoms include tremor, sweating, agitation, decreased concentration, thinking in circles around the subject of shopping, and/or depressive behaviour.

It is estimated that 1% of the population in western countries suffer from shopping addiction. One study showed the prevalence in the German population is 5%. It is also important to note that up to 90% of compulsive shoppers are women.

There are numerous causes for the development of this disorder, but many authors agree that decreased self-esteem is an important factor. Shopping addicts hope to diminish negative feelings and frustration through the high of a purchase. As the addiction progresses, fear of poverty, guilt, and depression take a more central role and are increased by financial problems. In the early stages, it is easy to hide the symptoms since high consumption is normal in western society. However, after years or decades of shopping addiction consequences are often massive: high debt and bankruptcy are common. Shopping addicts sometimes come into conflict with the law when they perform fraud, embezzlement, or theft in an attempt to solve their financial problems.

Treatment is limited to psychotherapeutic interventions, among which behavioural therapy is most often used. In the USA, antidepressant medications are also used to treat shopping addiction.

According to the Austria Press Agency from November 24, 2005, 10% of Germans between 20-24 years old and 13% between 25-29 years old have problems repaying credit. The inquiry at debt advice centers is higher than ever before and young adults in their late twenties make up a disproportionately high number of these inquiries with 18%. But the problem is not limited to the young. 9.74% of 45-49 year olds had more problems repaying credit in 2004 than in 2002. This shows that problematic and pathological consume is an increasingly common phenomenon.

In Austria, consumption behaviour of the general population was recently studied using a questionnaire developed by the University of Stuttgart-Hohenheim in which compulsive shopping indicators are used to detect possible danger of addiction. Between 2004 and 2005, this instrument was used to question Austrians over 14 years of age. The results of 24.8% for 2004 and 32.5% for 2005 reflect a definite to high risk of developing an addiction in regard to consumption for those surveyed. This is especially astonishing in the present economic situation because a reduction in consume would be expected in the face of increasing unemployment and decreasing budgets of individual Austrians. In this study, young adults and women also stand out as disproportionately affected. Interestingly, besides

age and gender, no other predicting indicators of shopping addiction (such as education, income or urban vs. rural) have been found.