

Effect of Doomscrolling on Mental Health: A Homoeopathic Review

Dr. Shweta Hiremath¹, Dr. Samina Bandalagi²

¹Associate Professor, Department of Homoeopathic Materia Medica, Dr. B. D. Jatti Homoeopathic Medical College, Hospital P.G. Research Center Dharwad. D.C. Compound. 580001

²Associate Professor & HOD, Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, BVVS Homoeopathic Medical College & Hospital, Bagalkot

Corresponding Author: Dr. Shweta Hiremath

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ABSTRACT

Doomscrolling is the habit of compulsive scrolling through negative news, on social media platform or internet continuously. This leads to overstimulation of brain and secretion of Dopamine- reward/motivation neurotransmitter which ultimately ends up in desire to scroll more and more resulting in anxiousness and depression.

Worldwide approximately, 15% of the population suffers from the mental and behavioral health disorders, anxiety and depressive disorders are the most common problems ruining the large number of lives. According to the research paper by Dr. (Ms.) Subhashree Panda, on impact of doomscrolling on wellbeing, consumption of negative news frequently, leads to anxiety, stress, depression, PTSD. It also decreases the level of wellbeing. So, keeping this in mind, this article aims to bring awareness about doomscrolling in society, along with the need of early realization of suffering individuals and scope of Homoeopathy in managing the cases.

This article explains the Doomscrolling behavior, biological facts behind it, its bad effects on physical and mental health, its measuring scale, along with the proposed homoeopathic aspect and therapeutics.

Keywords: Digitalization, Doomscrolling, Dopamine, Anxiety, Depression, Homoeopathy, Digital detox.

INTRODUCTION

In this information age, one cannot keep himself/herself, pre-eminent without the use of Technology. Digitalization highlights the rapid expansion of information technology and the internet; fundamentally altering how individual's access and share information.

This was all acceptable until this rat-race was only affecting adults. Pandemic of Covid-19, gave the curse of technological dominance from toddler to senior citizens. The prime safety measures administered by government was, Lock-down and Quarantine strategies, which later gave birth to 'Work from Home' dynamics and 'Online Education'.^[2] Luxury of personal laptop, mobile / I-pad screen became one of the primary needs for every individual and this is how the technology replaced parents and teachers as first Guru, for this Gen- Alpha. Smartphones with internet availability, increased access to information; provided personalized learning experiences with global platform to shine, but now we are facing the flip side. Compulsive scrolling has become one of the biggest struggles for 21st century people. Early gadget introduction in children made them, to cope up with boredom by scrolling instead of

play-ground activities. Increased stress levels in adults, made them to forget their anxieties in limitless scrolling instead of confronting them, and in the same manner, senior citizens are helping themselves to combat loneliness by simply scrolling through social media which gives them small addictive splurge of Dopamine.

Doomscrolling is an evil child of digitalization and internet freedom. Doomscrolling is defined by Cambridge dictionary as “the activity of spending a lot of time looking at your phone or computer and reading bad or negative news stories,^[3] whereas professor of psychiatry Dr. Richard Mollica from Harvard Medical school says “with the media’s propensity to blast mostly bad news (as the saying goes, “if it bleeds, it leads”) we are not getting any massages about hope- it’s all negativity”.^[4]

Physiological findings behind it:

Now, let’s start from the Emotions with which the process begins. Psychologist Paul Ekman, first described six basic emotions in year 1970 as happiness, sadness, disgust, fear, surprise and anger.^[5] These emotions are controlled by secretions of Hormones, Enzymes and Neurotransmitters, some of them are listed below.^[6]

1. Estrogen- positive mood hormone
2. Progesterone – calming hormone
3. Dopamine – motivation and reward chemical
4. Serotonin- happiness hormone
5. Acetylcholine- information processor neurotransmitter
6. Oxytocin – bonding hormone
7. GABA- brain activity regulator
8. Testosterone- primary male hormone
9. Nor-epinephrine and epinephrine – stress hormone
10. Endorphins – pain relief

In simple words, if you ever felt that, you could not stop scrolling, through your screen, even though you really want to, and hours has been passed just like that, just to keep yourself updated or informed about the sad or negative incidence happened elsewhere in the country, you are already a

victim of Doomscrolling. What happens exactly here is, even though dopamine is a rewarding and motivation neurotransmitter, it starts releasing in blood as brain cannot distinguish between good or bad stimuli. There is something exciting and new with each scroll and you are unknowingly under Dopamine hits^[7].

Doomscrolling triggers three specific neurotransmitters^[7]

1. **Dopamine** – which makes you feel, just one more scroll and your thumb never stops.
2. **Cortisol** – This makes you stay alert/ hyper-vigilant for danger, by activating threat centers in brain.
3. **Serotonin** – low levels of which, makes you to expose anxiety depression and hopelessness.

Bad effects of doomscrolling on physical and mental health^[8]:

Lack of physical activity – long hours of scrolling through gadgets reduces physical activity especially children’s and elderly peoples which gives rise to

- Sleeplessness
- High blood pressure
- Constipation
- Headache
- Eye-strain, myopia and other related problems
- Low appetite and Sometime binge eating
- Backache and cervical spondylosis
- Lack of physical strength
- Obesity and diabetes mellitus

Over-stimulation of brain- with short video clips and negative information videos makes you to suffer from multiple emotional and psychological symptoms such as -

- Anxiety and worry
- Sadness
- Hopelessness and emotional fatigue
- Reduced attention
- Low self-confidence
- Decreased critical analysis
- Depression

So, by this we can see that, these “pop-corn brains”^[4] are slowly moving toward

psychological distress, by killing their self-awareness and bombarding the mind with awful events from the world, and when it comes to seeking medical help for this problem, the society stays behind not because they don't want to be treated, or they can't afford it but, because they just don't know that, they are having some mental or psychological problem. They themselves are not aware about their sickness. And this is how Doomscrolling has its major impact on some psychological illnesses such as ^[9]–

1. Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)
2. Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
3. Panic disorder
4. Major depressive disorder
5. Generalized anxiety disorder

Doomscrolling scale:

In year 2022, researcher Bhakti Sharma et al ^[9] developed a scale to measure compulsive engagement with negative news online, which is known as Doomscrolling scale. This scale consists of 15-item self-report questionnaire, designed to measure the extent of an individual's obsession of doomscrolling. It uses a seven-point Likert scale, which ranges from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” with higher total scores indicating higher levels of doomscrolling. The unidimensional structure, provides excellent reliability when used in multiple research papers.

High scores on the Sharma Doomscrolling Scale are strongly linked to some behavioral and psychological characteristics like; Stress, anxiety, despair, and low life satisfaction. Personality Factors: Strong negativity bias, low conscientiousness, and high neuroticism are associated with this conduct.

Digital Habits: Fear of Missing out (FOMO), general social media addiction, and online alertness are common traits of strong doomscrolls. For speedier evaluations, researchers have also looked into a condensed 4-item version of the measure. However, the entire 15-item scale is extensively utilized in mental health and

communication studies for its good reliability and validity.

Homoeopathic aspect and therapeutics:

Though International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision; has dedicated a separate section to classify mental, behavioural, and neuro-developmental disorders, when it comes to the management part, Modern medicine considers diagnosis and severity of symptoms as a criterion for prescription, it focuses on group of common symptoms, which collectively gives a diagnosis for patients, whereas homoeopathy is a science where we consider patient as a whole. According to the book, “Organon of Medicine” written by Dr. Samuel Hahnemann, when two patients are even though diagnosed with same clinical diagnosis, they can receive different remedies, because in Homoeopathy we consider their specific emotional, mental and physical state, which may differ from person to person. Being a Homoeopath, we believe that mind brings equilibrium to physical body and its functions. The vital force which is spirit like power, keeps everything in perfect harmony. Homoeopathy heals by creating artificial medicinal disease, in its primary action and thereby freeing the vital force from the natural disease and bring back balanced mental and physical state of patient in secondary curative action of medicine. The founder of Homoeopathy Dr. Samuel Hahnemann, described about ‘Mental Diseases’ in his book Organon of Medicine, in aphorism 210 to 230, explaining relationship between mental and emotional disturbances and physical illness, disposition along with classification of mental diseases and its management ^[10]. After this Dr. James Tylor Kent worked deeply on understanding of mind and mental emotional symptoms and contributed to the Homoeopathic Materia Medica.

Following Kent, a number of influential figures have made an effort to comprehend the mind from many psychological angles, employing various ideas and evolving,

mental picture of remedies. By correlating moon phases, time dimensions and using a sharp analytical and synthetic approach with abstraction, Boger added a new level to our understanding of the mind. Drs. Whitmont, M. L. Dhawale, Philip Bailey, George Vithoulkas, and Catherine Coulter are notable examples who have, worked on mental symptoms and enriched our materia medica

Homoeopathy addresses Doomscrolling through a 'Bio-psycho-social holistic model' which encompasses neurobiological, behavioral, environmental and constitutional balance as a whole. Our three miasmas also reflect how a simple habit of overstimulation (psora), gets into obsession of scrolling more, for some extra information and alertness, which finally results in compulsive(sycosis) action of brain, resulting in depression and hopelessness(syphilis).

Homeopathic case taking, counselling, homoeopathic remedies along with some digital detoxes is the best way, by which one can overcome this Doomscrolling. Remedies like Aconitum, Argentum nitricum., Arsenicum album, Calcarea carbonica, Lycopodium clavatum; Natrum muriaticum, Gelsemium, Silicea, Phosphorus, Stramonium, prescribed solely on the basis of PQRS symptom similarity, will surely bring back the patient from the depression state along with counselling.

Here are some rubrics from Dr. J. T. Kents repertory, which includes the symptoms of doomscrolling in rubric form, with only grade one indication of Homoeopathic remedies-^[11]

- **Mind- Anxiety** – Acon, Arg-N, Ars, ARS-I, Aur, Bell, Bism, Bry, Cact, Calc, Calc.P, Calc.S, Camph, Cann-I, Carb.S. Carb V, Caust, Chin, Con, Dig, Iod, Kali Ars, Kali C, Kali P, Kali S, Lyc, Mez, Nat A, Nat C, Nit Ac, Phos, Psor, Puls, Rhus T, Sec, Sulph, Verat.
- **Mind- Despair** – Ars, Aur, Calc, Coff, Hell, Ign, Psor
- **Mind- Dwells on Past Disagreeable Occurrences** – Nat Mur, Rhus Tox.

- **Mind – Fear – Misfortune Of** – Chin-S, Psor.
- **Mind – Forsaken Feeling-** Aur, Psor, Puls.
- **Mind – Hurry-** Lil T, Med, Merc, Nat M, Sulph, Sul Ac, Tarent,
- **Mind- Indifference** -Apis, Carb V, Chin, Crot C, Hell, Lil T, Nat C, Nat M, Nat P, Onos, Op, Ph Ac, Pos, Plat, Puls, Sep, Staph
- **Mind- Indolence- Aversion to Work** -CarbnS, Chel, Chin, Graph, Lach, Nat M, Nit Ac, Nux V, Sep, Sulph
- **Mind – Lamenting-**Aur, Lyc, Verat, Vert V
- **Mind – Loathing of Life** – Antc, Ars, Aur, Chin, Merc, Nat M, Phos, Thuj
- **Mind- Prostration of Mind-** Aur, Con, Cupr, Ferr-Pic, Kali P, Lach, Lec Lyc, Nat C, Nat P, Nit Ac, Nux-V, Ph-Ac, Phos, Pic-Ac, Sep, Sil, Sulph
- **Mind- Restlessness- Nervousness-** Aco,Anac, Arg-N, Ars, Ars I, Bapt, Bell, Cal Cp, Camph, Cimic, Cit-V, Colc, Cupr, Cupr Ars, Ferr, Ferr Ars, Hyos, Merc, Plb, Puls, Rhus T, Sil, Staph, Stram, Sulph, Tarent, Zinc.
- **Mind– Sadness – Mental Depression-** Ars, Ars I, Aur, Aurm, Calc, **Calc Ar**, Calc S, Carb- An, Carb-S, Carc, Caus, Cham, Chin, Cimic, Crot-C, Ferr, Ferr I, Gels, Graph, Hell, Hipp, Ign, Iod, Kali Br, Kali P, Lach, Lept, Lil T, Lyc, Merc, Murex, Nat G, Nat C, Nat M, Nat S, Nit Ac, Plat, Psor, Puls, Rhus T, Sep, Stannn, Sulph, Thuj, Verat, Zinc.
- **Mind – Suicidal Disposition** – Aur, Aur M, Nat S
- **Mind Thoughts – Persistent** – Cann -I, Nat M,
- **Mind – Weary of Life (See Ennui, Loathing etc.)-** Ars, Aur, Chin, Phos
- **Mind- Work Aversion to Mental-** Aleo, Bapt, Chel, Chin; Lac, Nux V, Phos
- **Sleep – Sleeplessness –Thoughts, Activity of Mind From** – Ars, Calc, Coff, Hep, Nux V, Puls

Like these remedies there are many other homoeopathic medicines, which can be

prescribed for the psychological and physical bad effects of Doomscrolling. Along with the simillimum selected, patients must follow Some **Digital Detox Rules**, which are as follows [4].

1. Use Grey-scale mode- multicolored screens makes our mind to engage more by stimulating our brain and Grayscale makes phones "boring," which naturally leads to shorter view span.
2. Screen time limits- you can set your screentime limit and help yourself from getting swept by uncontrolled scrolling.
3. No phone zone as on dining table or in the bedroom- you can set the rule of no mobile zone in places such as dining area and bedroom, where you can share about your day with someone.
4. Use of alarm watches instead of phones- early morning scrolling is one of the major causes to put your brain in hyperactive state immediately after waking up, so using a simple alarm clock can be the solution.
5. Internet fasting- this is nothing but keeping your data off, so that frequent popping of notifications by multiple apps will not stimulate your brain to look for your phone frequently.
6. Deactivate or uninstall accounts from social media- internet freedom gives the liberty of posting anything on social media, on which a user has no control, so uninstalling social media accounts can be very helpful when you deal with the doomscrolling.
7. Engage in any other mobile free hobby or activity- meditation, yoga, exercise, or a simple long walk can help you distract overthinking in cases of depression. Apart from that self-care, talking with loved ones, cooking meals, reading book or writing gratitude journal can also be helpful for reducing stress.

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