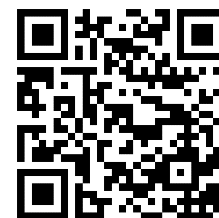


## Shopaholism From The Point of View of a Household Member of An Addicted Person



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### SUMMARY

*Introduction:* The aim of the author of this article is to present the issue of shopping addiction and its social consequences, with particular emphasis on family relationships and daily existence from the point of view of a person who is codependent and lives in the same house as a shopping addict. The article was created because of a request from a member of the household of a person who buys excessively various products or services. It consists of three parts. The first is to present the issue of shopping addiction in the context of behavioural addictions. The second is a quotation of current, although rudimentary, research on excessive buying, and the third one is a description and analysis of a conversation with a codependent person, a daughter, who talks about a household member in the context of excessive buying. The article ends with a summary that contains conclusions based on the literature and analysis of the collected research material.

*A case report:* The concept of an interview was developed on the basis of a survey of the psychological and sociological literature. The final part contains an analysis of the conversation (free interview) and conclusions from this analysis. The article outlines the research issues by analysing a conversation with the daughter of a person whose household members suspected addictive buying, and verifying the concept of addictive buying based on this case. Casual interview, conducted in December 2023 with a 28-year-old woman, resident of Krakow.

*Comment:* During the analysis of the presented case, it was noted: the respondent's satisfaction with the purchases made, combined with the justification of the purchase with the desire to improve the family's financial situation, because the products were at attractive prices or promotions; however, higher sums of money were spent due to collective, group purchasing of specific products (packing several pieces); while shopping, the person is as if in a trance, i.e., in another world, focused on shopping and what is happening in the store; shopping includes not only the purchase of things or products, but also continuous browsing and matching of service offers, e.g. purchases of various TV, Internet, and mobile phone packages; the surveyed person has had loans or other financial obligations for over 20 years, explaining them by the need to ensure the current functioning of the household (inability to save); uses the services of leasing companies (frequent car replacement - every two years).

**KEYWORDS:** shopaholism, behavioural addiction, new addiction, compulsive buying

### INTRODUCTION

The issue of addiction has become a permanent part of the canon of research in social sciences, e.g., psychology, pedagogy, and sociology. These studies take into account individual, family and social causes and effects of addictions. It also seems important to learn the social context of opinions about addictions and the behaviour of the addicted person's household. Research on addictions, the so-called visible, i.e. those whose individual and social implications are easily visible, e.g. a person drunk with alcohol, addicted to nicotine, or under the influence of a psychoactive substance is visible. However, there are groups of addictions, called behavioural or functional, that are difficult to notice at the first meeting or even difficult to see at all the signs of the addiction a given person is struggling with. This may be due to various reasons: a person who is addicted or performs certain activities compulsively does not notice his addiction, explaining his condition as "something normal, after all, everyone does it" or by denying the problem he has to live with.

The aim of the author of this article is to present the issue of shopping addiction and its social consequences, with particular emphasis on family relationships and everyday existence from the point of view of a person who is co-dependent and lives in the same house as a shopaholic. The article would not have been written if it had not been for a question from a person interested in the subject of addiction during a random conversation about the author's article regarding alcohol addiction. She suggested looking at the situation at home, her mother's behaviour, and the impact of this behaviour on the functioning of the entire family. The article consists of a theoretical outline of the topic discussed (compulsive buying), presentation of research on compulsive buying, and an

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analysis of a conversation with a person living with a shopaholic. The concept of the interview was developed on the basis of a survey of psychological and sociological literature. The final part contains an analysis of the conversation (free interview) and conclusions from this analysis. The article outlines the research issues by analysing a conversation with the daughter of a person whose household members suspected addictive buying and verifying the concept of addictive buying based on this case.

Behavioural addictions, increasingly described in the literature, concern compulsive behaviour with respect to selected activities. It is not without reason that Robert Modrzyński called them new addictions and, especially in the context of young people, defined them with the words: "from pleasure to compulsion" [10;9], because what might seem like everyday life (the Internet, mobile phones, computers, music, food) becomes the shackles of modernity.

Behavioural addictions are also called behavioural addictions. According to clinicians, social scientists, and medical researchers, the catalogue of addictions and disorders known as behavioural disorders is wide. Terms ending with -isms, by analogy to alcoholism, mean an addiction (addiction - holism) or compulsive performance of a specific activity. In terms of concepts, according to Bogusław Habrat, there is a confusion of definitions caused by the use of various terms to describe the same phenomenon. The author points to Polish practice and the lack of distinction between two concepts, addiction and dependence. Dependence means physiological and biochemical dependence on a psychoactive substance, whereas addiction is a mental state in which addiction forces one to take psychoactive substances or perform addictive activities.

Addiction should be considered psychologically, and its basis should be analysed due to complex neurobiological mechanisms, located mainly, but not only, in the mesolimbic system. The term "addiction" refers to serious complications caused by the use of psychoactive substances, when precisely defined phenomena such as withdrawal syndrome or pharmacodynamic changes in tolerance occur. Symptoms of frustration, irritability, anxiety, and difficulty concentrating in the context of behavioural addictions are incorrectly called withdrawal symptoms [5;11].

You can become addicted to almost anything, for example alcohol (an interesting form of alcoholism is alcorexia, which involves replacing food with alcohol in order to maintain a slim figure), nicotine, coffee, tea, drugs, medicines, cosmetics, chocolate, work, sex, gambling, television, computer, mobile phone, chess, a beautifully muscular figure, healthy eating, sunbathing in the solarium, adrenaline, beauty treatments and shopping [14;33].

The report on addictions published by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) in 2012 shows that approximately 3.5% of respondents are addicted to compulsive buying [1;23]. Addicted people are usually perceived in a stereotypical way that it is primarily a problem of rich and vain women, but at the same time mentally weak, who spend whole days searching for "conquests" in galleries or online stores. According to the respondents, it is more a "fad" than a serious disease, which is why this problem is largely depreciated in favour of addictions such as alcoholism or drug addiction [1;305]. The reasons for the spread of shopaholism were found in marketing pressure. Numerous advertisements, promotions, and seasonal sales encourage compulsive shopping [1;362].

The research conducted by CBOS in 2012 and 2015 shows that the phenomenon of shopaholism among young people is becoming more and more common. In 2015, addicts over 15 years of age constituted 4.1% of the Polish population and just three years earlier 3.5% [4;5]. In countries such as France, Spain, Canada, Germany, and Australia, the percentage of addicted people was between 1% and 10% of the total population of a given country [6;80].

Among people called shopaholics, women constitute a significant percentage of addicts (80%). This disease affects people under 25 years of age (30.6%) and people 25-34 years of age (26.7%). In this group, women (6.2%) are also more often addicted to compulsive buying than men (1.8%), so it can be assumed that the 'fair sex' has greater predispositions, for example, to consumerism [4;6]. At the same time, the number of addicted shoppers aged 35-44 among women and over 55 among men is increasing. Shopping addiction often goes hand in hand with another type of behavioural addiction. According to research, 2/5 of shopaholics are also workaholics, and every 10 are gamblers or people who show symptoms of network addiction [1;5]. Among the respondents, shopaholism is considered the least harmful addiction that has a negative impact on human life [4].

In turn, Iryna Kurlak, citing a number of studies, focused on the dependence of the choice of material goods on gender. Women are more likely to buy products that are supposed to have a positive impact on their appearance (e.g. cosmetics, clothing). Men, on the other hand, prefer things that symbolise power and luxury. The main interests of shoppers are clothes and accessories, which, regardless of sex, affect self-esteem and self-esteem. People who like to shop feel that expensive and luxurious objects define them as people [8;234].

Based on a few studies, Marek Krzystanek et al. found that in recent years between 2% and 8% of adults have developed shopaholism. Furthermore, this disease begins to develop at an increasingly young age. Typically, the disorder begins in adolescence and continues chronically into adulthood. Currently, children and adolescents are becoming consumers much earlier than their peers a decade ago, which means that society is exposed to shopping addiction at an increasingly younger age [7;150].

Statistics on the occurrence of the phenomenon are not very precise. Figures range from 2% to 16% and sometimes from 12% to 16% of the general population. Currently, the problem is believed to affect more women (80-90% of cases) than men. However, perhaps women simply admit it more easily [13].

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Shopaholism and compulsive buying are classified as habit and impulse control disorders. Taking into account the ICD-10 and DSM-5 classification of diseases, this disorder does not have an established nosological position [7;149].

At this point, a question should be asked: Need or compulsion to buy? According to the literature, neurobiological, psychological, and social factors contribute to the deepening of this addiction. Neurobiological factors related to biochemical processes, i.e., the complex system of neurotransmitters of the nervous system, such as serotonin, dopamine, endogenous opioids, and hormones, are responsible for what a person feels, thinks, and does. Neurotransmitters are responsible for transmitting signals between nerve cells [3;57]. Behavioural addictions are the result of a specific type of change in synaptic plasticity called neuroadaptation. In this regard, the literature distinguishes four theories of addiction: allostasis, the theory of cognitive processes, motivational sensitisation, and the mechanism of learning and memory. However, it also applies to other important functional systems of the brain, especially cognitive and emotional ones [3;60]. The psychological factors of addiction are based on various trauma and stress, which are then rewarded as a kind of compensation for complexes or self-esteem. In turn, social factors include progressive consumerism, acceptance of widespread shopping, frequent conversations about shopping, and lack of social control over shopping.

Shopaholism is also defined in the literature as compulsive, impulsive, unplanned, uncontrolled, dysfunctional, compensatory, pathological buying, compulsive consumption, shopping mania, obsession with buying, shopping addiction [3;]. Often, these terms are used interchangeably, but they cannot be treated as synonyms or interchangeably because they differ in the cause, frequency of occurrence, implications, and severity of the disorder. Unplanned and impulsive purchases happen to everyone, which does not mean that every person has an addiction [6;80].

Research on the addictive implications of shopping was carried out in the 1980s by Thomas O'Guinn and Ronald Faber. They pointed out that "compulsive buying, unlike ordinary shopping, is of a compulsive nature and is undertaken not so much in order to obtain necessary things, but to remove the discomfort that is the result of mental tension." They then proposed a definition of compulsive buying: "compulsive buying is chronic, repeated purchases that become the primary response to negative events and feelings of the individual; it is a type of compulsion - it is a behaviour qualitatively different from impulse or normal purchases. Provides the buyer with short-term pleasure but results in negative consequences in the long term" [8;233].

Shopaholism does not only involve purchasing material goods that a person wants to have or on a sudden impulse. This addiction is much deeper. As noted by R. Faber et al., purchasing the product is a subgoal. The overriding motive is the desire to improve one's mood, eliminate fear or negative emotions, and most importantly, purchase leads to the feeling that the individual has causative power and can independently decide about his own material goods and therefore about his own fate [2;26]. Addictive buying and shopaholism appear when shopping becomes an addiction and the buyer cannot refrain from making additional purchases, purchases frequently and experiences withdrawal symptoms more often [15;82].

Compensatory buying should be mentioned here. It is an irrational market activity because the assumptions of a free market economy treat shopping as a purposeful and rational activity performed in order to survive. Consumptive and compensatory behaviour does not serve survival purposes because it compensates for deficits resulting from the failure to solve completely different problems. Purchase is then a form of escape from stress at work or from private bitterness. The choice and purchase of a good is made not because of its utility value, but because it meets a need or eliminates frustration caused by an unsolved problem. This type of purchase is not a conscious activity, as it is a form of unconscious self-help. As a consequence, it can lead to shopaholism, which occurs when compensatory and consumptive shopping shows the characteristics of addiction, ie, limiting activities to specific objects and the inability to refrain from them, increasing the dose of abstinence syndrome [9;117].

Ordinary, everyday shopping differs from addictive buying in that addictive buying is neurotic in nature - it is treated as a mental disorder due to: a strong need to purchase goods, spending large sums of money (often exceeding the budget), loss of control over the time spent shopping. [8;234]. Compulsive buying is based on a certain pattern of behaviour that creates a cycle of disorder.

- 1) the appearance of negative affect, low self-esteem, and lower self-esteem;
- 2) impulsive buying;
- 3) remorse, feeling of guilt after shopping;
- 4) an attempt to reduce the negative affect resulting from the feeling of guilt after the previous purchase - repeating the cycle [6;80].

Based on observations of the behaviour of people addicted to shopping, researchers have identified several types of shoppers. An example of a typology is that developed by Susan L. McElroy:

- 1) people who buy mainly at sales, discounts, and occasional online auctions;
- 2) shopaholic-collector;
- 3) shopaholic innovator (a person who follows the news, buying primarily new, fashionable and "on top" products [6;80].

Criteria for recognising the symptoms of compulsive buying of things

- 1) obsessive and/or irresistible impulses and/or desires and/or preoccupation with buying/shopping;
- 2) reduced control over purchase(s);
- 3) excessive purchase of items without using them for their intended purpose;
- 4) using purchases to regulate internal states;

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- 5) persistent and repeated dysfunctional buying; shopping then results in negative consequences and impairment in important areas of functioning;
- 6) Limiting or stopping excessive purchases results in a negative attitude [11;217].

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The collected research material comes, as mentioned in the Introduction, from an informal interview conducted with the daughter of a person who, according to family members, had selected symptoms of shopping addiction. The casual interview, conducted in December 2023 with a 28-year-old woman, resident of Krakow, was transcribed and processed and covered the following topics:

- 1) the frequency with which a person makes purchases;
- 2) purchasing strategy of the analysed case: planned, spontaneous, stationary, or online purchases, alone or with other people;
- 3) the products or services;
- 4) Consultation on purchases or decisions made;
- 5) browsing leaflets, websites with promotions or using loyalty cards in stores;
- 6) Online shopping and returns of purchased goods;
- 7) conflicts with other family members due to shopping;
- 8) emotional state resulting from shopping, i.e., feeling of guilt or remorse regarding the money spent and purchases made.

### DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The person examined is a 49-year-old woman with secondary education in economics and who works as a saleswoman in a store selling industrial goods.

1. The respondent often goes shopping, even though she works in a general store selling industrial goods, so she knows the store's current offers from an advertising leaflet. She also has several loyalty cards from various grocery stores and even asked other family members to place such cards on their phone numbers to take advantage of promotional offers. He purchases groceries in-store and buys chemicals while shopping or goes to stores at other times. She buys cosmetics and clothing, shoes, and household items in stationary or online stores. He explains the reasons for shopping to family members: "I do it because there is a promotion", "it is cheaper", "I care about the budget", "I can buy more", "I do it for you". Generally, he goes shopping often, sometimes even a dozen times a week.

2. The daughter of the surveyed person claims that her mother has her own ritual every night in which, before falling asleep, she browses current promotional offers in supermarkets, writes down the products in promotion, and sometimes marks the products in which she is interested in in paper leaflets. It often happens that when buying selected goods, he or she also buys other products, leaving the store with a large number of products. There are advertising brochures everywhere in the house. The daughter noticed the disturbing behaviour of her mother in the store, as she runs between the shelves, rummages, browses, searches, and generally shops in a hurry, explaining her behaviour by fear of the disappearance of promotions or goods. She also noted that her mother goes shopping early (before the store opens) because she is afraid that other customers will buy the goods. Shopping planning (special offers). She usually travels alone or with other family members in a private car in which she has bags (nets) or a basket. Purchases are made in-store at selected popular grocery stores or convenience stores. If you are unhappy with your purchases, you can also travel to neighbouring cities to buy the desired product.

3. Most of the time, he buys groceries, although he also buys chemical products or clothes. She usually orders clothes online and has them delivered to her home. He consults his purchases of household items with his relatives, but not always. She often makes decisions about buying goods herself, even in larger quantities. What is disturbing is that she accumulated a large amount of various things that she bought on sale, including several sets of towels, several sets of bedding, sets of pots, cutlery, bowls, glass, knives, and an iron. Sometimes, a few packs of mineral water or a few cartons of juices were noticed in the house. These items were supposed to come in handy. Excess products are a bone of contention at home because the respondent's husband is against buying excessive amounts of food, which he has to eat and is often thrown away due to the short shelf life, the so-called offers from orange labels of one of the food markets, which contain products with a short expiry date (yogurts, buttermilk, kefir, sweets, juices, drinks, cold cuts).

4. Most of the time, he does his shopping alone. He consults the purchase of selected products with family members on the basis of: "I am in the store, there is something interesting, take it from you."

5. The analysed case uses promotional brochures and websites and keeps track of offers. He can go shopping at Lidl one morning before work, and the next day at dawn he can go to, e.g. Biedronka, Brico, or Aldi. He prefers to shop in stationary stores, although he uses a number of portals, e.g., e-obuwie, Allegro, OLX, Zalando. When purchasing goods online, you pay by delivery or by transfer. What draws attention is the fact that he knows couriers and asks them to deliver packages to work.

6. He leaves most of the goods purchased (clothes), but sends many items to online stores. The worst time was the pandemic, when women, staying at home, bought a lot of sundries and "couriers drove one after the other." At that time, many articles, clothing and

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shoes were ordered and then returned. In the subject's bedroom, near the bed, there is a stack of boxes containing shoes, clothes, and other items.

7. Shopping was initially treated as something natural, good and valuable. Over time, comments from household members took the form of mocking comments and allusions, but now there are more and more frequent requests for thoughtful shopping and not wasting food. During the conversation, the daughter's grief and grievances were repeatedly observed against her mother, who devotes less time to her than to her interests or daily activities related to shopping. A perfect example of this situation is to organise and go out for a New Year's Eve party together. The mother asked her daughter several times to buy a few dresses on her behalf for this occasion, without asking her daughter if she would have anything to wear. It has become a kind of tool in online shopping. The interlocutor also pointed to repeated quarrels and disputes resulting from excessive throwing away of purchased goods as waste and throwing away money in the context of the fight for climate and the planet. The disputes also concerned the addicted shopper and her husband, who, focused on his own activities, i.e. work, hobbies or household chores, sees the problem of buying and excessive spending of money, but is ineptly silenced and calmed down by the explanation that it is for his good. The respondent's husband is not satisfied with shopping for clothes, believing that he buys clothes himself when "something catches his eye" or he needs it, e.g. new shoes or a jacket. His wife buys him completely unnecessary clothes, often without consulting him about the purchases, for which he is angry with her. In addition, she asks her husband for his opinion about the fourth pair of shoes (moccasins), which differs from the previous one with a ribbon or other finishing (sign, decoration).

8. According to the interviewee, "browsing" in stores is a woman's element. He likes to do it, he says, he has a knack for it. Shopping is often explained by the well-being of the family, the necessary supplies or the need to take advantage of an offer that may not be repeated again.

During the analysis of the presented case, it was noticed:

- 1) the respondent's satisfaction with the purchases made, combined with the explanation of the purchase by the desire to improve the family's financial situation, because the products were at attractive prices or promotions; however, higher sums of money were spent due to collective, group purchasing of specific products (packing several pieces);
- 2) while shopping, the person is in a trance, that is, in another world, focused on shopping and what is happening in the store;
- 3) shopping includes not only the purchase of things or products, but also continuous browsing and matching of service offers, e.g. purchases of various TV, Internet, and mobile phone packages; the surveyed person has had loans or other financial obligations for over 20 years, explaining them by the need to ensure the current functioning of the household (inability to save); uses the services of leasing companies (frequent car replacement - every two years).

The interviewee's mother felt the need to brag about the things she found. She could spend 2-3 hours looking for things and every time she came back excited to show me what she found online. She always asked the interlocutor's opinion, hoping for approval, which then translated into the purchase of something. If the interviewee did not like a given item, she tried to make her mother realise that she did not need another pair of shoes, she did not purchase it at that moment, but in the next few days she looked for a substitute for the original purchase. You did not have to buy clothes. What mattered was the act itself, that is, buying something. In turn, the husband of the compulsive shopper joked about the numerous packages at first, but only later noticed that it was a problem. However, he focused not on how this situation affects his wife and her mental health, but on the material situation and family finances. This means that he was more concerned that too much money was spent on clothes or food products that were wasted and thrown away than that his wife's habitual buying and returning of goods was dangerous. Her purchases were often ill-considered; after a while she decided that she did not need it and gave it back. According to the interlocutor, her mother likes to brag about what she bought, e.g. the type of goods, the price, the fight for the goods (you can feel that she is proud of herself when she manages to buy something that was not readily available), whether there was any free of charge.

## CONCLUSION

Compulsive buying is an interesting phenomenon from the point of view of a researcher of social phenomena. There is a paucity of empirical research and current research due to the problems in their implementation and the difficulties in reaching respondents. What seems like a natural behaviour to take care of the needs of household members becomes bothersome to them. A person who compulsively buys various goods explains it by caring for the needs of the family and ensuring the financial continuity of the household, without noticing the risk factor in the form of constant orientation towards purchasing goods and services, focussing on the analysis of press materials, website offers, applications, conversations about offers or new items that need to be purchased. The everyday life of a person struggling with the problem of excessive buying involves the entire family, exposes family members to tensions (disputes resulting from disagreement with the buyer regarding her behaviour), is associated with food waste (excessive buying leads to throwing away food that has not been consumed within the specified time), collecting excess items and food products. The buyer's satisfaction combined with a sense of guilt, returning (returning) purchased items with the involvement of family members, contact with couriers, or trips to the parcel locker generate further tensions and financial losses and require time. A person who buys compulsively justifies his behaviour by caring for the well-being of the family and family finances, not including

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losses resulting from fuel used, time spent shopping, or browsing offers. A short analysis, which would not have happened without the intervention of the interested daughter, shows a strong involvement in buying and the risks associated with it.

If family members notice the problem, start conversations and see its consequences, it can be assumed that the person should go to a specialist (psychologist) to present his situation and ask for help and diagnosis. The data analysed show the variability of life, the impact of addictive shopping on family relationships, and the indication of the problem between household members. Shopaholism, like other types of behavioural addictions, is often overlooked in silence due to fear of rejection or deterioration of relationships in families and emotional relationships, without the awareness that intervention can actually heal them.

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