



Making Sense of Compulsive Hoarding



Jerome Bublick, Ph.D.
June 8, 2012



CHILD MIND
INSTITUTE

Compulsive Hoarding

- A disorder in which a person fails to throw away worn-out or useless items, and may acquire additional items
- People are commonly referred as pack-rats
- Associated with OCD, but not formally a diagnosis by itself yet.

Characteristics of Hoarding

- No known prevalence rates. Estimates at 2-3% of population
- Age of onset: variable across lifespan. Age range 5-80+ (can be associated with dementia)
- Gender: 1:1
- Children may outgrow symptoms

Hoarding as a Symptom

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Obsessive Compulsive Personality

Depression

Eating disorders

Dementia

Schizophrenia

Hoarding Disorder

- Persistent difficulty discarding or parting with possessions, regardless of their value
- This difficulty is due to a perceived need to save the items and distress associated with discarding them
- Symptoms result in accumulation of possessions that congest and clutter active living areas and substantially compromise their intended use.

- If living areas are uncluttered, it is only because of the interventions of third parties
- Causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning
- Not attributable to other medical conditions
- Is not better accounted for by other DSM V conditions

Excessive Acquisition: If symptoms are accompanied by excessive collecting or buying or stealing of items that are not needed or for which there is no available space

Insight levels

- Good: recognizes behaviors as problematic
- Poor: mostly convinced its not problematic
- Absent: completely convinced its not problematic

Difference Between Hoarders & Collectors

Collectors

- Feel proud of their possessions
- Keep possessions organized and well-maintained
- Find joy in items
- Willing to display items
- Budget time and money

Hoarders

- Are embarrassed by possessions
- Possessions random, causing clutter
- Are uncomfortable having others view possessions
- Often have extreme debt
- Feel angry/violated when others talk about items

Common Possessions

Plastic bags

Batteries

Cardboard boxes

Tools

Photographs

Clothing

Household supplies

Jewelry

Books

Mail

Toiletries

Food/groceries

Pens/pencils

Handouts

Why People Save

Fear of losing information

Indecisiveness

Fear of memory loss (out of sight = out of mind)

“Just in case” & “here for now” thinking

Fear of making a mistake

Sentimental & Aesthetic Saving

How Hoarding Affects People

- Lack of functional living space
- Unhealthy living conditions
- Unsafe living conditions
- Effects on families
- Social issues

Additional Storage Is Not the Answer

- Does **not** fix the problem
- Leads to increased financial pressure
- Leads to increased family tension
- Eventually ends up as more cluttered, nonfunctional space

Treatment Options

No medication specific to hoarding

Medications effective in treating secondary depression and/or anxiety

Cognitive behavioral treatment most effective

- Only if hoarder is active participant

Exposure to sorting

- Select target area, assess possessions in that area, rate from easiest to hardest, sort into boxes & bins, begin sorting using cognitive skills to help. Continue until area is clear, maintain area, plan for future use of area
- Clean outs can be effective when the hoarder is trained, prepped, ready and participant

Exposure to acquisition

- In vivo and imaginal exposures to: fear of losing information, losing possessions, seeing but not acquiring, missing sales, limited shopping excursions