

Hoarding

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The space we make in our houses is a result of the amount of area we need for our belongings. What if we had a substantial amount of belongings which left us with no space? We could find alternatives, like throwing away some of the items that are of no importance to make room. However, for some people around the world, getting rid of items is an idea that rarely crosses their minds. These people are better known as hoarders. Hoarders are people who cannot get rid of spare or useless possessions even if their possessions have started to reduce their amount of living space. Hoarders have a difficult time moving around their homes due to a lack of space. There is no specific age where one begins hoarding, but it is known to mostly begin in the childhood of a patient with mild symptoms. Hoarding does not discriminate against gender, age or race. Hoarding is believed to be caused by stressful or traumatic events that occurred during childhood. For example, one can lose a loved one and begin to hoard. They will do this because they might feel a sense of companionship, love or loyalty from their possessions. The possessions will help replace some of the feelings that were lost with the passing of a loved one. Apart from psychotherapy and medications, there are no real cures for hoarding. It is difficult to treat hoarding and it is not something that can be cured overnight. (Compulsive Hoarding, downloaded 9/16/2011).

A research study was conducted on hoarders to help get a better sense as to the age hoarding may have been triggered, the increase or decrease in severity of symptoms over time, and the frequency of stressful or traumatic events. Researchers constructed an online survey that would answer questions that were vital to better understanding this condition. The research was conducted by David F. Tolin, Suzanne A. Meunier, Randy O. Frost and Gail Steketee. They found subjects from a database

that had more than 8,000 people who had communicated with these researchers over the last couple of years about hoarding behaviors. Of those 8,000 subjects, the majority did not complete the online survey (N=751). Researchers received data starting on November 14, 2006 and ending on January 15, 2007. They were all asked the same questions, and all participants were kept anonymous. They were measured with different tests such as the Obsessive-Compulsive Inventory-Revised and Depression Anxiety Stree Scale-21. Participants were also asked about psychiatric work-loss days and 25 life events they had experienced. For a reward, participants enrolled in a raffle that would allow them to win one of ten self-help books on compulsive hoarding (Tolin, Maunier Frost, & Steketee, 2010).

Researchers found that the onset of hoarding grew as time progressed within an individual. A correlation of $+0.77$ was found showing they had been correct when they predicted that it could be traced back to an early start and that most suffered a traumatic event in their lives (Tolin et al, 2010).

Surveys have been known to be a bit unreliable because it is based on opinion and participants can lie. Although the research was conducted as a survey, I find it to be the best way in reaching the largest amount of people. This study could have been improved by looking at more than one data base, by studying newly diagnosed hoarders and those who are in remission.

This study is valuable in that researchers were able to identify onset triggers and they made this information available to the general public. This will help society to see that people may not be the “trash-collectors” they are often accused of being, but instead see this is a treatable disorder. Another valuable aspect of this research is that

hoarders may now see that their behavior has less to do with stashing things of perceived value and much more to do with harmful beliefs they have held on to as a survival mechanism. This may prompt more to seek necessary help.

Prior to reading this study, I would have thought a messy home reflected laziness because of the values my parents instilled in me to keep an orderly house. Now I understand there may be psychological issues behind the mess. This makes me far less likely to judge others, and may even help me to reach out to those who may suffer with hoarding behaviors.

References

About Compulsive Hoarding: Compulsive hoarding. Retrieved September 16, 2011 from

<http://www.compulsive-hoarding.org/About.html>

Tolin, D.F., Meunier, S.A., Frost, R.O., & Steketee, G. (2010). Course of compulsive hoarding and its relationship to life events. *Depression & Anxiety* (1091-4269), 27(9), 829-838.