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A Descriptive Study of Hoarding Behavior: The Cold, Hard Facts

Type, Cost, Location, Severity, Frequency, Recidivism Rates and Demographics of Tucson, AZ Residents Who Hoard

Primary Researchers: Amy Bowles, Psychology Undergraduate, with Lisa O'Neill, MSW

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Hoarding: We Don't Know What We Don't Know

This project seeks to quantify various attributes of hoarding situations found within the city of Tucson and surrounding communities in Arizona. With the potential to radically change how people with hoarding behavior are treated, this is a descriptive study of the type, cost, location, severity, frequency, recidivism rates and demographics of people with hoarding behavior, as encountered by various state and local entities. Ultimately, this research is intended to facilitate inter-agency cooperation and establish a database of information to justify legislation that will provide for and maximize funding for therapeutic, comprehensive and effective intervention in hoarding situations, statewide.

Irrespective of socioeconomic status, lineage, profession and level of intellect, the behavior known as hoarding is most often a result of a person's history of experience with negative life experiences, and that leads to "the acquisition and failure to discard a large number of possessions that appear to be useless or of limited value" (Frost & Hartl, 1996). Hoarding is further defined by "living spaces that are sufficiently cluttered so as to preclude activities for which those spaces were designed" and finally, hoarding causes "significant distress or impairment in functioning" (Frost & Hartl, 1996).

A field of study only about 10 years old, the further scientific collection of data associated with hoarding cases is vital if the state is to create statutes and obtain funding for treating the mental illness known as Hoarding Disorder.

To facilitate this vision, a comprehensive database of information is needed, and will offer the opportunity to impact how different agencies become involved and resolve a hoard. It will also provide information about downstream effects, such as having children taken away by Child Protective Services (CPS), having a criminal record as a result of a failure to clean up, having a home condemned, or a person removed by force by Adult Protective Services (APS). Such effects drastically alter a person's ability to progress and recover. Similarly, upstream effects are equally relevant, such as the loss of a job or loved ones, poor or absent mental health care (which often results in untreated depression and anxiety disorders-both which worsen hoarding behaviors), and the inability to afford the services of an organizer to help before the problem gets out of hand. Finally, demographic data is vital in establishing behaviors and attributes common to people who hoard, in order to better facilitate early intervention and treatment.

With hard data available, what happens before can be actively monitored, and what often happens after can be mitigated. Effective, compassionate and affordable treatment of people who hoard, their homes and their neighborhoods is the intended long-term goal that will result of this study.

Materials & Methods

- Descriptive "proof-of-concept" study
- Combination participant observation, survey and case study research designs
- Non-random convenience sample of 9 individuals who hoard:
 - 8 Females, 1 Male, Mean Age: 57
- Primarily demographic data collection

A screenshot of a demographic data collection form. It includes sections for 'PERSONAL INFORMATION' (Name, Address, Phone, Email), 'HEALTH' (Current Health, Past Health, Medications, Allergies), and 'SOCIAL HISTORY' (Education, Employment, Relationships, Substance Use). The form is filled out with handwritten text.

A screenshot of a form titled 'STRESSORS & SAFETY'. It contains several checkboxes and text fields related to safety concerns, stressors, and emergency contacts. The form is filled out with handwritten text.

A screenshot of a form titled 'HEALTH & SAFETY'. It contains sections for 'HEALTH' (Current Health, Past Health, Medications, Allergies), 'SAFETY' (Current Safety, Past Safety, Safety Concerns), and 'SOCIAL HISTORY' (Education, Employment, Relationships, Substance Use). The form is filled out with handwritten text.

A screenshot of a form titled 'HOME ASSESSMENT'. It contains sections for 'HOME ASSESSMENT' (Home Safety, Home Hazards, Home Maintenance) and 'CAPACITY ASSESSMENT' (Cognitive Function, Decision Making, Problem Solving). The form is filled out with handwritten text.

A screenshot of a form titled 'CLUTTER RISK ASSESSMENT'. It contains various checkboxes and text fields related to clutter risk assessment. The form is filled out with handwritten text.

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- SCALES USED:**
- Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS)
 - Saving Inventory- Revised (SI-R)
 - Hoarding Rating Scale (HRS)
 - Depression Scale (CES-D)
 - Hoarding Risk Assessment (HOMES-R)
 - Clutter Image Rating Scale (CIRS)
 - Demographics & Intervention (D&I)

TYPE OF HOARDING: OBJECT / ANIMAL / OCD <i>(Circle whichever apply)</i>		
If Animal:	HOW MANY	STATUS
DOGS		
CATS		
BIRDS		

HEALTH	ACCESS		USABLE		REASON/RESULT <i>(Circle appropriate answers; add notes in blanks & on back, if needed.)</i>	CIRS
	Y	N	Y	N		
Bathtub/Shower #1					Inoperable / Cluttered / Unhygienic / Water Shut Off	
Toilet #1					Inoperable / Unhygienic / Water Shut Off	
Bathtub/Shower #2					Inoperable / Cluttered / Unhygienic / Water Shut Off	
Toilet #2					Inoperable / Unhygienic / Water Shut Off	
Kitchen Counters					Damaged / Cluttered / Infestation	
Stove					ELECTRIC or GAS? Inoperable / Cluttered / Infestation	
Fridge					Inoperable / Spoiled Food / Infestation / Overloaded	
Pantry					Damaged / Spoiled Food / Infestation / Overloaded	
Sink					Inoperable / Cluttered / Filled w/Dishes / Unhygienic / No Water	
Garbage					Overflow / No Service	
Recycling					Overflow / No Service	
Bed #1					Damaged / Cluttered / Unhygienic / Infestation	
Bed #2					Damaged / Cluttered / Unhygienic / Infestation	
Living Room					Blocked / Cluttered / Unhygienic / Infestation	
Family Room/Den					Blocked / Cluttered / Unhygienic / Infestation	
Dining Room					Blocked / Cluttered / Unhygienic / Infestation	
Playroom					Blocked / Cluttered / Unhygienic / Infestation	
Studio/Craft Room					Blocked / Cluttered / Unhygienic / Infestation	
Sunroom/Porch					Blocked / Cluttered / Unhygienic / Infestation	
Garage					Blocked / Cluttered / Unhygienic / Infestation	
Shed					Blocked / Cluttered / Unhygienic / Infestation	
Pet Cages/Beds					Damaged / Cluttered / Blocked / Unhygienic / Infestation Presence of Urine / Presence of Feces	
Litter Boxes					Damaged / Blocked / Unhygienic / Infestation / Presence of Urine / Presence of Feces	
Swamp Cooler					Blocked / Inoperable / No Electricity / Cannot Afford	
Air Conditioning					Blocked / Inoperable / No Electricity / Cannot Afford	
Heat					ELECTRIC or GAS? Blocked / Inoperable / No Electricity / Cannot Afford	
Medication					Expired / Cannot Locate / Excess	-
Medical Equipment					Cannot Locate / Inoperable / Missing Parts	-
Human Urine/Feces <i>outside of toilets</i>	-	-	-	-	Present: YES/NO Which Rooms? _____	-
Animal Urine/Feces <i>outside litter boxes</i>	-	-	-	-	Present: YES/NO Which Rooms? _____	-

STRUCTURE & SAFETY

WATER
ELECTRICITY
GAS
SEPTIC/SEWER
GARBAGE
RECYCLING
Porch
Stairs
Walls
Roof/Ceiling
Floorboards
Water Heater
Heat Sources
Air Vents
Electrical Wires
Hazardous Materials
Weapons

Notes: _____

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Children
Adults

ID#: _____ Date: _____

HOMES Multidisciplinary Hoarding Risk Assessment

HEALTH	ACCESS		USABLE		REASON/RESULT <i>(Circle appropriate answers; add notes in blanks & on back, if needed.)</i>	CIRS
	Y	N	Y	N		
Animal Hair & Dander	-	-	-	-	Present: YES/NO Excess: YES/NO	-
Insects/Rodents	-	-	-	-	Present: YES/NO Excess: YES/NO	-
Mold or Dampness	-	-	-	-	Present: YES/NO Black Mold: YES/NO # of Rooms 1 2 3 4 5 6 ALL # of Rooms 1 2 3 4 5 6 ALL	-

Notes: _____

OBSTACLES	ABILITY		REASON/RESULT
	Y	N	
Move Freely/Safely			Excess Clutter / Goat Trails / Disability / Injury
EMT Access			Excess Clutter / Goat Trails
Manage Clutter Piles			Unstable / Avalanche Risk
Exit/Egress Access			Windows Blocked or Damaged / Doors Blocked or Damaged

Notes: _____

MENTAL HEALTH	ABILITY		REASON/RESULT
	Y	N	
Insight into Seriousness			Not a Hoarder / Not too bad / It's usually better /
Accepting of Consequences			I have more time / Don't Care if I go to jail /
Defensiveness/Anger			
Anxiety/Apprehensiveness			
Unaware/Confused/Not Alert			Medications / Drugs / Alcohol / Psychosis

Notes: _____

ENDANGERMENT	THREAT		REASON/RESULT
	Y	N	
Threat to Spouse			Neglect / Physical Abuse / Psychological Abuse
Threat to Minor			Neglect / Physical Abuse / Psychological Abuse
Threat to Senior			Neglect / Physical Abuse / Psychological Abuse
Threat to Disabled person			Neglect / Physical Abuse / Psychological Abuse
Threat to animal(s)			Neglect / Physical Abuse / Confinement
Threat to common-wall neighbor			Fire Hazard / Structural / Infestation / Mold / Water Damage

Notes: _____

Threat of Condemnation

Other Legal Matters

Assessment Notes: _____

STRENGTH		CAPACITY <i>(Check item)</i>
Y	N	
		Awareness
		Acknowledgment
		Acknowledgment
		Physical Ability
		Psychological
		Willingness

Notes: _____

SELF-CARE

DENTAL HYGIENE

GROOMING

BMI / BODY WEIGHT