

# The Psychology of Hoarding

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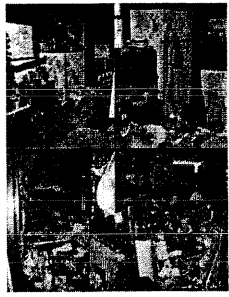
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Hoarding? Messy? Pack Rat? ADHD?  
OCD? Normal? Cat Lady?




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## Hoarding Defined

- Hoarding can be defined as:
  - “the excessive collection and retention of things or animals until they interfere with day-to-day functions such as home, health, family, work and social life”.

(Fairfax County Hoarding Task Force Annual Report, 2009)

- *Hoarding is a multi-faceted problem that has a variety of psychological, physical welfare, economic, and public safety implications.*

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### Not a diagnosis, but...

"Hoarding" is NOT a DSM-IV-TR diagnosis and there are no universally accepted diagnostic criteria. Frost and Hartl (1996) do, however, offer the following hallmarks of hoarding:

- The acquisition of and failure to discard a large number of possessions that appear to be useless or of limited value.
- Living spaces sufficiently cluttered so as to preclude activities for which those spaces were designed.
- Significant distress or impairment in functioning caused by the hoarding.
- Reluctance or inability to return borrowed items; as boundaries blur, impulsive acquisitiveness could sometimes lead to kleptomania or stealing.

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### Hoarding is NOT...

- Being messy (*lucky for me*).
- Collecting a bunch of "stuff".
- Having a lot of trash in your backyard.
- A filthy/cluttered house.
- Simply having too many of something.
- Being a big-time animal lover.

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### Hoarding IS...

Excessive and seemingly unreasonable keeping of things (i.e. animals, inanimate possessions), in such a way that *significantly impairs/disrupts the day-to-day use of the residence*. The need/desire to keep these objects assumes TOP PRIORITY (more important than anything else), and, as such, friends/family/loved ones (frequently children, elderly, disabled), animals, work, health, safety, and self-care may be neglected and/or ignored.

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### Hoarder Profiles

1. Good Samaritan
2. Disabled / Elderly Person
3. Cruel / Neglectful Person
4. True Hoarder

Kaup-Fett, CCCHD (2010)

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### Good Samaritan Characteristics

- This person has taken on a burden in order to do a good thing but has become overwhelmed.
- Intervention by government officials may be perceived as threatening or insulting since their intentions are not to harm.
- This person is generally capable of correcting the problem with assistance.
- This person is generally willing to accept help in obtaining the desired end point as long as euthanasia is not an option for the animals.

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### Disabled/Elderly Person Characteristics

- This person has gradually decompensated, through disability, age or isolation, and is unable to manage his/her life and possessions. Intervention may be perceived as threatening and frightening.
- This person is generally capable of correcting the problem with help.
- This person is generally eager to accept help in obtaining the desired end point after they are reassured that no one is trying to force them into a home or euthanize their pets.

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### Cruel/Neglectful Person Characteristics

- This person has allowed the environment to become unsafe and unsanitary through neglectful or purposeful means.
- This person may acknowledge your viewpoint, but will resist or refuse to correct the problem due to ulterior motives, such as:
  - money from the sale of purebred animals
  - sport
  - desire for "power" or displaced anger
  - a cruel and vindictive temper
  - reckless indifference to pain or neglect
  - drug abuse

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### True Hoarder Characteristics

- This person may feel threatened or insulted any type of intervention. He/she truly believes they are improving the condition of the animals (disease & starvation) within their household environment (in spite of overcrowding & unsanitary conditions).
- This person typically responds to intervention attempts with hostility and disinterest and may appear not to fully grasp the plight of the animals, his or her own health and well-being, and on that of other household members.
- May often be disinterested or hostile to the negative effect of the animals or trash on the health and welfare of neighbors.

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### In short...

- Good Samaritan and Elderly/Disabled Person situations are fairly easy to resolve due to lack of ill intentions and good faith desire.
- Cruel / Neglectful Person typically requires enforcement to resolve their situation.
- The True Hoarder requires special attention, resources to successfully resolve their situation due to lack of insight and desire to change their situation.

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### Where Does It Come From?

Hoarding appears to be a secondary symptom of one or more of the following problems:

- Delusional disorders and grandiosity
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Dementia/Cognitive deterioration
- Addiction and/or substance abuse
- Zoophilia
- Attachment disorders
- Depression/anxiety

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### Intervention: Sometimes Too Little Too Late

- Citizens do report compromised/ blighted properties, and neighbors do complain about residents that neglect property and create a public nuisance. That being said, interior hoarding conditions are rarely discovered until an emergency arises. A true hoarder may also be able to defend, hide or mask the severity of their living situation very well, and therefore serious situations may go unreported.

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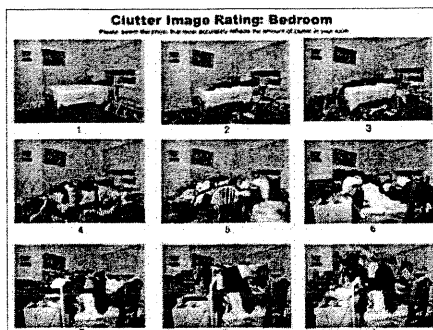
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### Levels of Hoarding




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### Animal Hoarding



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### Animal Hoarder - Definition

Any individual who possesses a large number of companion animals, fails to provide adequate nutrition and veterinary care, and keeps the animals in a severely overcrowded environment.

Fleury, 2007

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### Real Consequences...

- Many animal hoarders also neglect or provide inadequate care to humans (including self, children, elderly, disabled) in the home. Negative effects include complications from infection, inadequate nutrition, lack of water/electricity/bathroom. Fire hazards and insect infestations are also common. *Animal waste toxicity produces an especially dangerous living situation.*
- Animal victims also prone to psychological, behavioral, and/or physical problems, and, as such, have difficulty being placed or adopted. *Many animal victims undergo euthanasia after being placed in shelter.*

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### Animal Hoarder Profile

- 76% are female.
- Most are unmarried and most live alone.
- 46% are age 60 or older.
- 65% keep cats. 60% keep dogs.
- 80% have dead or sick animals in the home.
- 69% have animal feces and urine in the living areas.
- 60% are repeat offenders.
- Most hoarded inanimate objects as well.

» Clark County Health District, 2010

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### A few more stats...

- Cats, dogs, birds, and farm animals most commonly hoarded (Patronek, 1999).
- 80% hoarded inanimate objects (Patronek, 1999).
- Avg. # of animals per case – 39 (Patronek, 1999).
- *Nearly 100% recidivism after prosecution* (Patronek, 2006).
- 34% of animal hoarders found to have one or more dead animals in home (Berry, Patronek, & Lockwood, 2005).

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### Understanding the Animal Hoarder

**Who?**

Men, women, young, old, all SES, all nationalities, all education levels. Though not universal, many animal hoarders live a rather solitary lifestyle. Many animal hoarders also started collecting various items/objects as a child.

**What?**

Keeping/housing a larger than usual number of animals and providing them with inadequate care, while at the same time being unable to recognize/understand, or simply disregarding, the adverse effect of the environment on the health and well-being of animals/humans in the home. *Denial is a core feature.*

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Why?

Hoarders, in general, often view their possessions as being a core component (if not *the* core component) of their identity. Animal hoarders care deeply about their animals/pets and find it extremely difficult to let them go. They typically cannot comprehend that they are in any way harming the animals and, in fact, truly believe they are improving the life of the animal and doing what "is right" for the animals, if not truly "saving them" (all the while believing others should respect/admire them for their actions). Hoarding" can provide them with self-esteem and purpose. If their purpose/self-esteem is challenged, this is when they tend to go to greater and/or more pathological means to defend their actions. Excuses and/or shifts of blame are common, and they generally lack insight (or interest) into the various negative effects of the hoarding behavior.

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### Intervention

Key word = multidisciplinary.

- Human health and social services
- Housing authorities
- Legislators
- Community health professionals
- Animal welfare professionals

Fleury, 2007

*The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has developed a "Hoarding Prevention Team" to assist hoarders.*

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### Treatment?

- Psychopharmacological treatment.
  - Various antidepressants are prescribed to manage symptoms. This should not be viewed as a "cure".
- Generally a consensus that psychotherapy is needed in conjunction with meds. Appears to be some empirical support for ERP as therapy modality. Remember, however, relapse rates for animal hoarders are extremely high, as truly addressing the denial and/or delusional thinking associated with hoarding can be quite the challenge.

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