

Compulsive Hoarding: Causes and Effects

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Compulsive hoarding is a psychological disorder wherein a person has an intense resistance to getting rid of their possessions, even when getting rid of them will benefit them. This behavior leads to amassment of all sorts of objects that end up filling up living areas. Eventually, the items are not used for the purpose for which they were intended (Moulding & Knight, 2021). The condition is included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), the main guide that mental health professionals in the U.S. use to classify mental health disorders. Hoarding is a problematic behavior that can be classified from mild to severe, where the living conditions of a hoarder become unsafe (Mathes et al., 2020).

Compulsive hoarding is considered a genetic, environmental, or psychological disorder. It is thought that genetics plays a role in encouraging hoarding since a person can be genetically predisposed to it. Stressful situations or circumstances that can arise from the outside environment, such as a traumatic event or the attainment of a new developmental phase, can also lead to or worsen hoarding behaviors. Perceived psychological factors or formerly diagnosed mental disorders (e.g., obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), anxiety, or depression) are usually involved. People diagnosed with a hoarding disorder tend to feel a certain level of affinity towards objects they consider part of them or that bring them security (Moulding & Knight, 2021).

Compulsive hoarding has serious outcomes with severe ramifications on different domains of an individual's life. Cognitively, hoarding is associated with living conditions that are life-threatening due to clutter, which leads to risks arising from fires, weakened structures, mold, pests, and dust. From this perspective, hoarding manifests socially by isolating people; people

probably feel embarrassed to have such living conditions, hence giving up on social functions (Mathes et al., 2020). This may also lead to heightened feelings of loneliness and depression, as the individual is now entirely cut off from society. Furthermore, pathological hoarding imposes severe costs on the individual who spends a considerable amount of money buying items that they do not need (Suñol et al., 2020).

In terms of emotion, hoarding can take a toll on the hoarder and their families or friends with time. Cognitive responses such as frustration, anger, and helplessness, as well as feelings of embarrassment, shame, and guilt, may be felt within the family members due to the disorder. This can put pressure on interpersonal relationships and sometimes may cause rifts in families and people being expelled from their homes. A person suffering from hoarding disorder cannot discard things, and doing so causes them great stress and discomfort. It might be unbelievable, but giving something away is so terrifying that it confirms the pathology, building an unfortunate cycle that cannot be stopped without help (Mathes et al., 2020).

Compulsive hoarding requires several types of therapy and may also be treated pharmacologically in some instances. The most utilized treatment is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which assists the patient in confronting and modifying their unconstructive behaviors and processes concerning hoarding. By using CBT, the patient can identify areas of disorder, acquire organizational skills, and make sound decisions on the kind of clutter that is acceptable to them (Moulding & Knight, 2021). Antidepressant drugs such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) can also be recommended since, in many cases, hoarding could be due to other mental health disorders such as anxiety or depression. Other options like mutual support organizations and family therapy can also be beneficial, as most people suffering from mental disorders report feeling lonely and misunderstood (Suñol et al., 2020). Through intensive inpatient or outpatient

care and follow-up counseling, afflicted individuals can regain a significant amount of control over their living environment and increase general levels of well-being. It is important to understand the causes, effects, and treatment options for compulsive hoarding. This will help society to understand victims and offer them the support they need.

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