

Hoarding Behaviour

Fact? Or Fiction!

There are plenty of mistruths, myths, and inaccurate assumptions made about people who hoard, hoarding behavior, and hoarded homes. Here are five of the most common myths and the truths that dispel them.

Myth: Hoarded homes are filthy and the people who live in them are dirty.

Truth: The term hoarding refers to the volume of clutter or quantity of objects in a given space. It does not refer to cleanliness. Instead, the term squalor describes filth or the ruin of a space due to neglect. It is possible, and in fact quite common, to have an environment that is filled with clutter but is relatively clean.

Myth: People who hoard are lazy and choose to live the way they do.

Truth: Hoarding behaviour is a mental illness recognized by the American Psychiatric Association. People who hoard express shame, sadness, guilt, remorse, and embarrassment at how their illness negatively impacts their lives and those they love.

Myth: Living through an experience like the Great Depression causes hoarding.

Truth: Hoarding is a complex problem with many factors contributing to the onset and course of the illness including: genetic predisposition, neurobiological factors, difficulties with cognitive processing, problematic thinking, and strong emotions. There is no scientific evidence to suggest that deprivation or trauma alone cause hoarding.

Myth: Hoarding is unique to North America and is a consequence of North American materialism.

Truth: Research suggests that hoarding occurs at similar levels in the global north. Clinical treatment and research is taking place in countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and Australia and Japan. It is still unclear how common hoarding is in developing nations.

Myth: A mass clean-out involving garbage bags, shovels, and dumpsters is the best way to solve a hoarding problem.

Truth: A large scale, one-time clean-out of a hoarded home will most likely result in feelings of helplessness, violation, and resentment that may lead to further hoarding behavior or serious mental health problems. Instead, the best way to help a person with hoarding behaviour is through slow, systematic exposure to sorting and discarding possessions and resisting the acquisition of new items.

International Resources

BOOKS

- Bratotiis, C., Schmalisch, C. S., & Steketee, G. (2011). *The hoarding handbook: A guide for human service professionals*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Muroff, J., Underwood, P., & Steketee, G. (2014). *Group treatment for hoarding disorder: Therapist guide (treatments that work)*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Steketee, G. & Bratotiis, C. (2020). *Hoarding: What everyone needs to know*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Steketee, G. & Frost, R.O. (2010). *Stuff: Compulsive hoarding and the meaning of things*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Steketee, G. & Frost, R.O. (2013). *Treatment for hoarding disorder: Therapist guide (treatments that work)*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Steketee, G. & Frost, R.O. (2013). *Treatment of compulsive hoarding: Workbook (treatments that work)*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Tolin, D., Frost, R.O., & Steketee, G. (2013). *Buried in treasures: Help for compulsive acquiring, saving, and hoarding (treatments that work)*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Tompkins, M.A. & Hartl, T.L. (2009). *Digging out: Helping your loved one manage clutter, hoarding and compulsive acquiring*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Tompkins, M.A. (2015). *Clinician's guide to severe hoarding: A harm reduction approach*. Oakland, CA: Springer.

WEBSITES

Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT)
<https://www.abct.org/Home/>

International OCD Foundation (IOCDF) Virtual Hoarding Center
<https://hoarding.iocdf.org>

Mass Housing
<https://www.masshousing.com>

SELF-HELP

Clutterers Anonymous (CLA)
<https://clutterersanonymous.org>

Messies Anonymous
www.messies.com

Messies Anonymous Self-Help Group
<https://messies.com/groups/>

The International Obsessive Compulsive Foundation Self-Help Resource Directory
<https://hoarding.iocdf.org/how-to-use-the-resource-directory/>