Hoarding Disorder: Identifying, Understanding, and Treatment in Multifamily Housing

Madelyne Pfeiffer, MSW - President of MJ Housing and Services

TO ALL PARTICIPANTS!!!

As respect for others in the class, place phones on “Silence”, “Vibrate” or “Off”. If you MUST answer, thank you for exiting the room.

How many of you have dealt with a resident who was hoarding?
COMMENTS ON HOARDING

• “That isn’t hoarding she is a slob!”
• “That’s so sick. How could anyone live in there?”
• “Oh please miss stop making excuses and clean up your nasty house.”
• “This ain’t called being a hoarder; this is called being a lazy bum.”
• “Hoarding possessions I can go some way to understanding but the ones who sit in a pile of rubbish are just filthy pigs, that is not hoarding that is blatant slobbery and laziness.”

Challenge in the management of multi-family housing.

Interference with:
  * property inspections
  * pest control
  * tenant and building safety
  * health and quality of life of the resident

DEFINITION

Compulsive hoarding:
• the acquisition of, and failure to discard, useless or limited value possessions
• living spaces are cluttered and unusable
• significant distress caused by hoarding

(Frost & Hart, 1996)
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)

• In May 2013 the American Psychiatric Association (APA) confirmed what property management companies, owners and many Fair Housing Practitioners have already known. Hoarding is a mental disorder and is now protected as a DISABILITY.

• This classification is official and should serve as a reminder that handling hoarders is a delicate situation that could have serious Fair Housing implications if not handled correctly.

HOARDING IN THE DSM 5

Hoarding Disorder is the name of a psychiatric condition that produces symptoms such as the compulsive urge to acquire unusually large amounts of possessions and to voluntarily get rid of those possessions, even when they have no practical usefulness or monetary value. Until recently, mental health guidelines in the United States viewed hoarding as a specific form of another condition called obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). The American Psychiatric Association designated the disorder as a distinct form of mental illness in May 2013.

TYPES OF HOARDERS

• Hoarding
• Squalor
• Animal Hoarding
HOARDING

Hoarding is related to the volume of clutter in the home, not the cleanliness.

SQUALOR

Property or personal

ANIMAL HOARDING

Animal hoarding: involves the failure to provide adequate facilities for animals, overcrowded or unsanitary living conditions, inadequate veterinary care, poor nutrition, etc.
FOOD HOARDING

• Not much written, but becoming more known
• Particularly present in those that have lived through the Great Depression or a time of little to no food available, such as those with a history of being homeless.
• A sign of anxiety surrounding the availability of food
• There is a slightly higher percentage of females than males that hoard food
• Often lives alone and is mostly socially isolated.
• Nearly three out of every four adults that hoard food do not believe that it is a problem.

MORE FACTS ON HOARDING

• Hoarding is a mental health disorder
• Clutter is only a symptom of the problem
• It is often characterized by low insight.
• 92% of individuals with hoarding have 1 or more other mental health (e.g., depression, generalized anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, social phobia)

WHY DO PEOPLE HOARD?

• Trauma
• Decision Making Deficit
• Emotional Attachment
DEMOGRAPHICS & PREVALENCE

- Saving begins in childhood ~ around 11-13
- Average age in treatment = 50
- Marital Status: tend to be single
  - Low marriage rate, high divorce rate, tend to live alone
- Education: ranges widely
- Family history of hoarding is common
- Squalid conditions uncommon among treatment seekers
- Estimates 8% of US Population (19 million Americans)
- Occurs cross-culturally: Japan, UK, Australia, Germany

PREVALENCE OF HOARDING 2–5%

- 6% in US (adjusted)
- 2% in UK
- 4.8% in Germany
  - Nearly 3X as common in people age 55 and older
  - Over 4X as common among people with low income (< $20,000)

MANIFESTATIONS OF HOARDING

- Acquisition
- Saving
- Disorganization
HOARDING BEHAVIORS

- **Saving**: Sentimental, instrumental, intrinsic
- **Acquisition**: Buying, acquisition of free things
- **Clutter/Disorganization**: Random piles, churning
- **Difficulty Discarding**: Indecision, attachment

COMMONLY HOARDED ITEMS

- Clothes
- Magazines
- CD/Video Tape
- Old Notes
- Pens
- Bills
- Newspapers
- Receipts
- Cardboard
- Boxes
- Old Food Containers
- Freebies
- Wool
- Fabric
- Pins
- Clothing rags
- Old Medication
- Body Products (nails, hair, feces)
- Used Diapers
- Rotten Food
- Plastic & Paper Bags
- Books
- Animals

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES OF WORKING WITH PEOPLE WHO HOARD

- Beliefs and Emotions associated with objects
- Beliefs about self in relation to world
- Vulnerabilities (Time, Family History, Loss, etc.)
- Co-morbid Conditions (Mental and Physical Health)
- Cognitive Distortions (Problematic Thinking)
People with hoarding problems have varying levels of insight about the extent of their problem and the ways that it impacts them & those around them

- Non-insightful
- Insightful but unmotivated
- Insightful, motivated, but noncompliant
CLUTTER RATING SCALE

CLUTTER IMAGE RATING

INEFFECTIVE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

- Make decisions (about a plan of action) for a resident
- Argue or Persuade
- Pressure the tenant to discard
- Tell the tenant how to feel
- Give verbal and non-verbal cues that are judgmental or negative in nature
- Acting like a taskmaster or drill sergeant
What NOT to do

• Don’t argue with the person about what to get rid of and what to acquire
• Don’t take over decision making
• Don’t touch or move anything without permission
• Don’t tell the person how they should feel
• Don’t work beyond your own tolerance level

What makes people motivated to change?

Factors Influencing Motivation

Confidence  Importance

• How much social support?
• Are there any home visitors?
• Can anyone monitor homework?
• How depressed is the tenant?
• Can tenant tolerate discomfort?

FOCUS ON INTERNAL MOTIVATION

• Be clear about expectations and limitations
• Ask open-ended questions
• Reflectively listen
• Use respectful, non-judgmental language
• Mirror the language used by the resident
• “Work with” the resident instead of “doing for”
Tips for Effectively Helping

- Be a cheerleader!
- Help the person maintain focus on the task at hand
- Provide emotional support
- It can be helpful to be empathetic by using encouraging statements
- Help the person make decisions, but DO NOT make the decisions for them.
- Prompt, do not order
- Help with hauling
- Assist on future shopping trips to establish “I don’t need to buy this” behaviors

Community Resources

- Virtual Hoarding Center: www.iocdf.org
- Professional organizers for chronic disorganization: www.challengingdisorganization.org
- Hauling – for example: 1-800-GOT-JUNK
- Local health clinic
- Local cleaning services
- Local community task force

Hoarding: The Legal Framework
LEGAL QUESTIONS
WHEN DOES HOUSEKEEPING BECOME A LEGAL PROBLEM?
WHEN DOES REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION COME INTO PLAY?

HOARDING IS A LEGAL PROBLEM WHEN...
It violates applicable housing health and safety standards, including those for animals
It endangers vulnerable people as defined by state law

HUD HOUSE RULES (1)
May include requirements for: Garbage disposal, including disposal of
- Grease
- Smoking materials
- Used syringes or other biohazards
Keeping kitchen and bathroom fixtures in operable and sanitary condition, including
- no scum or mold build-up
- clean drains
HUD HOUSE RULES (2)

May prohibit

- Storage of hazardous materials
- Blocking of exits
- Blocking of heating vents
- Overloading circuits and hazardous use of extension cords
- Garbage or clutter that attracts insects or rodents or produces foul odors

HUD HOUSE RULES (3)

May prescribe repair/maintenance standards

- Prompt reporting of repair needs
- Clear access to repair area
- Prompt reporting of infestation
- Cooperation with necessary extermination

HUD SANITARY STANDARDS

CAT

- May require changing of cat litter, but no more than twice/week
- May require removing waste from litter, but no more than once/day

CATS & DOGS

- May prescribe disposal of litter and waste
- Require control of noise and odor
HOARDING IS A SERVICE PROVIDER LEGAL PROBLEM

When it endangers:

• Children
• Elders (over 65)
• Persons with Disabilities (any age)
• Animals

WHAT KINDS OF DANGER

Health and Safety

• Physical hazards, especially with disability
• Health hazards
  – Mold
  – Infestation
  – Excessive dust
• Fire and egress hazards
• Structural/systems hazards

PERSON W/ A DISABILITY CIVIL RIGHTS DEFINITION

• A PHYSICAL or MENTAL IMPAIRMENT which SIGNIFICANTLY INTERFERES with one or more MAJOR LIFE ACTIVITIES

• In this case, the major life activity of housekeeping (and possibly other activities)
Because it is a disability, people with hoarding disorder must be accommodated in compliance with the Fair Housing Act.

Help educate ALL STAFF (including maintenance) to treat hoarding behaviors with due sensitivity.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION (1)
Applicable when:
- Resident has a disability
- Disability is cause of housekeeping problem
- Resident wants an accommodation
- Disability is obvious or there is relevant verification including ability and willingness of resident to cooperate.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION (2)
Accommodation does not:
- pose undue burden (including finance)
  - No set formula
  - Cost of accommodation vs. size & financial condition of owner’s overall housing business
- require a fundamental change in nature of program
  - Administrative time?
  - Effect on ability to carry out other responsibilities
ACCOMMODATION PLAN INCLUDES
1. Specific standards in specific areas
2. The timeline for each step and the deadline
3. Who will do the cleanup and trash removal
4. Who will check and how often
5. Services resident will accept
6. Relevant releases
7. Consequences for failure to follow plan
8. Ongoing monitoring

DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT!
• Courts will look for proof that a landlord/property manager actually made attempts to accommodate the tenant’s disability
• Log conversations between staff and residents
• Documentation can help or hurt in an eviction case
• Follow all rules and regulations for your county/state
• Seek advice from an attorney when it doubt

Our Contact Information
Svetlana Borkin, MSW
Regional Service Coordinator Manager
Magnolia Towers
11035 Magnolia Blvd
North Hollywood, CA 91601
Tel: 818-763-2123
Fax: 818-763-2023
sborkin@mjhousingandservices.com

Dee Amundson, PSC
Service Coordinator & Hiring Specialist
Drehmoor Apartments
215 E. 19th Ave
Denver, CO 80203
Tel: 303-832-0821
Fax: 303-863-9175
damundson@mjhousingandservices.com
Resources


https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/hope-relationships/201409/the-psychology-behind-hoarding


http://www.helpforhoarders.co.uk/what-is-hoarding/

Resources

https://books.google.com/books?id=7ve4gAgAAQBAJ&pg=PA25&lpg=PA25&dq=hoarding+in+germany&source=bl&ots=bctfs82STR&sig=q_ifmE5bqR_FerQIteIekFCX488&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiysOOOwtfVAhUQ5mMKHfiUC6A4ChDoAQhBMAw#v=onepage&q=hoarding%20in%20germany&f=false

http://www.dietsinreview.com/diet_column/12/understanding-food-hoarding-as-a-symptom-of-anxiety/