Perceptual Influences for Potential Hoarders

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Background:

Hoarding has been defined "as (i) the acquisition of a large number of possessions that appear to be ... of limited value, (2) living spaces sufficiently cluttered so as to preclude activities for which these spaces were designed, (3) significant ... impairment in functioning caused by the hoarding, and (4) reluctance ... to return borrowed items" (Frost and Hartls, 1996, p. 341).

Clinically significant hoarding has been estimated at 2-5% of the general U.S. population (Samuels, Bienvenu, & Riddle, 2008). Hoarding tendencies and behaviors often begin in late childhood and early teenage years (Grisham et al., 2006).

Method:

Participants, recruited from social media outlets and in-class announcements, answered the online hoarding survey. Over 1,265 people of different ages, backgrounds, and other varying demographics completed the 55-item survey, which had 29 multiple-choice questions, 38 yes/no questions and three Likert-point scales questions with 5-6 points each in order to gather sufficient general knowledge on hoarding knowledge and behaviors.

The self-report questionnaire was accessed through qualtrics.com September 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012. In addition, the study was put on byu.sona-systems.com to enable BYU students and others to electronically participate in the 15-30 minute research study.

The research results shown here are just some of the information gathered from the larger study about public perceptions of hoarding.

Implications:

We propose educating younger individuals regarding hoarding behaviors and tendencies. This may reduce their chances of becoming victims of this disorder in their youth and having hoarding impact them later in life.

Such education programs would also increase the public’s knowledge of treatment options and methods, should they become aware of a hoarding situation.

Results:

Approximately 64% of the participants that responded to our survey reported they knew a hoarder. 72% of the people who knew a hoarder were female, 97% were white, 72% had received a high school diploma, and 24% had completed their college/vocational education. 69% of those who knew a hoarder had an income less than $10,000, while 16% had an income over $50,000. Of the participants that responded, we found significant correlations between demographics and hoarder identification: age, r(1,265)=.270, p<.01, gender r(1,265)=.067, p<.05, income range r(1,265)=.215, p<.01, and education r(1,265)=.163, p<.01.

We also did logistical regressions between age, gender, income, ethnicity, education, and number of adults/children in the household with other-hoarder identification and self-hoarder identification. We also did logistical regressions and found that age, children living with; and interesting, Native Americans (as compared to Caucasians) significantly increased the odds ratio of knowing a hoarder.

Discussion:

Significant correlations exist between an individual’s self-diagnosis, knowledge of others’ hoarding behaviors and (1) their knowledge of treatment options, (2) belief that a successful treatment exists, and (3) their personal pursuit for treatment, especially when factors of gender, race, age, and education are calculated. This data suggests that people who are aware of their own hoarding tendencies are also aware of treatment options, which they believe can be successfully treated.

It can be inferred from the research that hoarders and those that know hoarders are not able to recognize tendencies until later in life, at which time they also become aware of treatment options.

It would be beneficial to do future research directed toward hoarding prevention in the younger population with the hope to circumvent this disorder earlier in life.

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