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Public Perception of Hoarding

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Background:

Hoarding has been defined as (1) 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 750 people with different backgrounds, ages, and other varying demographics completed the 55-item survey, which had 29 multiple-choice questions, 18 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 February 6 to March 6, 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.

Results:

Approximately 76% of the participants that responded to our survey reported they knew a hoarder. 80% of the people who knew a hoarder were female, 97% were white, 49% had received a high school diploma, and 41% had completed their college education. 42% of those who knew a hoarder had an income less than $10,000, while 36% had an income over $50,000. Of the participants that responded, we found significant correlations between demographics and hoarder identification: age, r(748)=.212, p<.01, gender r(748)=.073, p<.01, income range r(748)=.183, p<.01, and education r(748)=.133, p<.01.

We also did a logistical regression between the demographics of age, gender, income, education, and number of adults/children in the household with hoarder identification. The logistical regression model was significant with χ²(6) = 41.25, p<.001 and we found the only significant correlation of all the demographics was age.

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.

Statistics:

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.

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