Hoarding Behaviors in Foster Care: A Series of Case Studies

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What is Hoarding?

- Acquisition of numerous items
- Failure to discard seemingly useless possessions
- Clutter that interferes with daily activities
- Considerable distress

Frost & Hartl, (1996)
Introduction: Case Studies

- Plimpton, Frost, Abbey, & Dorer. (2009)
  - Question based from clinical experience
  - Focus on:
    - Manifestation, effects, onset & fluctuations, associated problems, explanations for behavior (child), family history
- 6 case studies
- Findings
Early Attachment

• Early interactions between parent and child
• Abusive/neglectful behaviors by parents/caregivers

Attachment Disorder

– Symptoms of AD
  • Stealing, Hoarding, & Gorging
  • AD can precede other disorders

– Foster Children
  • Lack opportunities for attachment
  • Require more parenting

– Counselors can provide security

Parker & Forrest (1993)
Methods

• Participants
  – 8 foster parents of foster children who exhibited hoarding behaviors
  – Recruitment
    • DSS
    • Local children’s clinic
Purpose & Hypotheses

• **Purpose:**
  - To investigate the characteristics of hoarding in foster care children.

• **Hypotheses:**
  - High incidence of food hoarding, specifically carbohydrates and sweets
  - High incidence of psychopathology & trouble behaviors
  - Attachment deficits
Amy

- Background
  - Neglectful Mother

- Hoarding began with food
  - Food, Paper, Objects
  - Hid under bed & around room

- Behavioral Problems
  - Viewed possessions as part of identity
Laura

• Background
  • Abusive foster mother

• Hoarded mostly carbs & sweets
  • Wrappers, candy & gum
  • Hid under bed

• Behavioral problems
Tommy

- **Background**
  - Physical & sexual abuse

- **Hoarder anything from the kitchen**
  - Crackers, cookies, cheese, Pop-Tarts, juice
  - Secretive hiding spots; store & not eat

- **Behavioral & Eating Problems**
Linda

- **Background**
  - Young Mother & Abusive foster family
- **Hoardding began with food**
  - Food, First Aid, Elastics, jewelry, crayons
- **Behavioral Problems & Attachment**
Peter

- Background
  - Abusive parents

- Hoarding began with trash picking
  - Broken Electronics & Sweets
  - Food was ALWAYS hidden under bed & in dresser

- Behavioral & Learning Problems
Katie

• Background
  • Failed adoption

• Hoarding began with clothing
  • Food, Outgrown clothing, Scraps of paper
  • Hid items all around room and in plain sight

• Behavioral Problems & Eating Behaviors
Andrea

• Background
  • Physically abused by biological parents

• Hoarded anything she could find
  • Trinkets, scraps of paper, Food
  • Kept items in pillowcase & closet

• Behavioral & Developmental Problems
Amanda

- **Background**
  - Neglectful family history
- **Brought 2 carloads of items to foster home**
  - Stuffed animals, blankets, notebooks, papers
  - Hid in trash bags, under bed & overflowing closet
- **Behavioral Problems & Hygiene**
Discussion

• All but ONE child exhibited food hoarding
• Co-morbid disorders
• Disordered Eating
• Variations in attachment deficits
• Variations in age of onset
Limitations & Future Research

• Small sample size
• Retrospective Interviews
• No control group
• Convenience sample
• Actual age of onset unknown
• No quantitative data
References


