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

• Hoarded 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

- **Hoarding 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


