

**National Adult Protective Services Resource Center
NAPSA/NCPEA Research Committee
Research to Practice Brief
Research Summary**

Title - Hoarding Cases Involving Older Adults: The Transition From a Private Matter to the Public Sector

Author(s) - Rosemary Kennedy Chapin, Julie F. Sergeant, Sarah Terrebonne Landry, Terry Koenig, Matthew Leiste, Kim Reynolds

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Summary of Research

This study examined the characteristics of hoarding cases, defined as “excessive acquisition, clutter, and inability to discard possessions”, that were reported to the public sector, defined as government agencies or organizations that provide services to the public. The study collected data from public sector agencies’ open hoarding cases and telephone interviews with multiagency hoarding team (MAHT) members. The age of hoarding adults ranged from 60-95 years. Sixty-nine percent were either widowed, divorced, or had never married. Fifty percent lived with a spouse, partner, or relative, and 60% were socially isolated. Sixty-five percent of cases involved living spaces limited to one room or area and another 65% had exits blocked by clutter. A little over one-third reported health hazards such as pests, rotting food, human or animal waste, and nonworking utilities. Thirty-one percent of cases involved animal hoarding. Seventy-nine percent of acting agencies were social services and 21% were regulatory. Referral to another agency was the most common action taken at 67%; these referral agencies included social service agencies (51%), regulatory agencies (17%), and private cleaning services (9%). Twenty-three percent were referred to multiple agencies. About 25% of adults refused services. Twelve percent of cases included cleanup activities and another 12% resulted in the pursuit of legal penalties. Ten percent of older adults were hospitalized following public health involvement; 17% of hoarders and 15% of public workers experienced injuries or worsening of illnesses. Of cases in which the residential outcome was known, 74% of hoarders remained in their homes, while 26% moved; of those who moved, 55% went to nursing homes.

Practice and Policy Implications

The results suggest a need among public service agencies to coordinate, considering that multiple agencies are becoming involved in the same cases through referrals or repeated cycling through the system, as well as a need for cross-training and networking between the agencies by MAHTs. Absent formal efforts at coordinating at higher levels among agencies, APS practitioners could be encouraged to build informal networks among their counterparts in other organizations. The study encourages public agencies to reshape their intervention strategies by intervening early and taking approaches that empower the hoarder; the latter may involve focusing on the strengths of the hoarder and integrating their support networks in the interventions. It also supports the need for practices that protect the safety of intervening personnel, as well as hoarders.

For Further Reading

Franks, M., Lund, D. A., Poulton, D., & Caserta, M. (2004). *Understanding hoarding behavior among older adults: A case study approach*. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 42(3/4), 77–107

Koenig, T., Chapin, R., & Spano, R. (2010). *Using multidisciplinary teams to address ethical dilemmas with older adults who hoard*. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 53, 137

Steketee, G., & Frost, R. (2003). *Compulsive hoarding: Current status of the research*. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 609, 1–22.

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Prepared by:
Danielle Richards
Research Consultant