

Hoarding Disorder

Fact? Or Fiction!

There are plenty of mistruths, myths, and inaccurate assumptions made about people who hoard, hoarding behavior, and hoarded homes. Here are five of the most common myths and the truths that dispel them.

MYTH: Hoarded homes are filthy and the people who live in them are dirty.

TRUTH: The term hoarding refers to the volume of clutter or quantity of objects in a given space. It does not refer to cleanliness. Instead, the term squalor describes filth or the ruin of a space due to neglect. It is possible, and in fact quite common, to have an environment that is filled with clutter but is relatively clean.

MYTH: People who hoard are lazy and choose to live the way they do.

TRUTH: Hoarding disorder is a mental illness recognized by the American Psychiatric Association. People who hoard express shame, sadness, guilt, remorse, and embarrassment at how their illness negatively impacts their lives and those they love.

MYTH: Living through an experience like the Great Depression causes hoarding.

TRUTH: Hoarding is a complex problem with many factors contributing to the onset and course of the illness including: genetic predisposition, neurobiological factors, difficulties with cognitive processing, problematic thinking, and strong emotions. There is no scientific evidence to suggest that deprivation or trauma alone cause hoarding.

MYTH: Hoarding is unique to the United States and is a consequence of American materialism.

TRUTH: Research suggests that hoarding occurs at similar levels in many industrialized countries throughout the world. Clinical treatment and research is taking place in countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and Australia. It is still unclear how common hoarding is in developing nations.

MYTH: A mass clean-out involving garbage bags, shovels, and dumpsters is the best way to solve a hoarding problem.

TRUTH: A large scale, one-time clean-out of a hoarded home will most likely result in feelings of helplessness, violation, and resentment that may lead to further hoarding behavior or serious mental health problems. Instead, the best way to help a person with hoarding disorder is through slow, systematic exposure to sorting and discarding possessions and resisting the acquisition of new items