

Executive Deficits in Non-Clinical Hoarders

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Abstract : Hoarding is the acquisition of and failure to discard possessions, leading to excessive clutter and significant psychological/emotional distress. From a cognitive-behavioural approach, excessive hoarding arises from information-processing deficits, as well as from problems with emotional attachment to possessions and beliefs about the nature of possessions. In terms of information processing, hoarders have shown deficits in executive functions, including working memory, planning, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility. However, this previous research is often confounded by co-morbid factors such as anxiety, depression, or obsessive-compulsive disorder. The current study adopted a cognitive-behavioural approach, specifically assessing executive deficits and working memory in a non-clinical sample of hoarders, compared with non-hoarders. In this study, a non-clinical sample of 40 hoarders and 73 non-hoarders (defined by The Savings Inventory-Revised) completed the Adult Executive Functioning Inventory, which measures working memory and inhibition, Dysexecutive Questionnaire-Revised, which measures general executive function and the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale, which measures mood. The participant sample was made up of unpaid young adult volunteers who were undergraduate students and who completed the questionnaires on a university campus. The results revealed that, after observing no differences between hoarders and non-hoarders on age, sex, and mood, hoarders reported significantly more deficits in inhibitory control and general executive function when compared with non-hoarders. There was no between-group difference on general working memory. This suggests that non-clinical hoarders have a specific difficulty with inhibition-control, which enables you to resist repeated, unwanted urges. This might explain the hoarder's inability to resist urges to buy and keep items that are no longer of any practical use. These deficits may be underpinned by general executive function deficiencies.

Keywords : hoarding, memory, executive, deficits

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