

PATHWAYS

A Hoarding Research Partnership Publication

2020
Summer

DIRECTOR'S CORNER



When September rolls around, I always get a “new notebook” feeling. School is starting up again, and there is a freshness about new projects. For just a short period of time, I am not behind

on anything! This September promises to be pretty weird, thanks to the pandemic. The things I thought we would be doing will be done...differently. Still, at the Centre for Collaborative Research on Hoarding, we are very excited to be starting up projects in partnership with community agencies who work with hoarding across Canada. As you'll read in this inaugural issue of *Pathways*, we have spent the summer gearing up to launch new projects in our research on harm reduction in hoarding – and our community partners are essential to that work. I encourage you to reach out to us if you have questions or ideas. We would enjoy hearing from you!

Sheila Woody, PhD, RPsych
Director



UBC Centre for Collaborative
Research on Hoarding

RESEARCH UPDATES



This past spring, Sheila Woody and Christiana Bratiotis each received competitive research grants from the [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council](#). We will use the funds

to lay the groundwork toward an evidence-informed harm reduction protocol developed in collaboration with community agencies that work with hoarding. Our immediate goals are to develop a cross-disciplinary assessment tool that can be used for both program evaluation and research and to identify best practices in community-based hoarding interventions.

This summer, we have been working on a literature review to identify targets of community-based interventions for hoarding across service sectors. In this review, we aim to synthesize the results of academic research *and* community-generated knowledge. Led by doctoral student Kate Kysow, our team has identified and evaluated articles or reports in scholarly journals and over 100 websites. After eliminating those documents that do not meet the criteria for our review, we will go through and identify the risks or hazards (which we are calling *targets*) that community-based interventions are mandated to address as well as strategies those agencies use. This is a big undertaking, and we are still in the thick of it.

RECENT CENTRE PUBLICATIONS



Hoarding affects many people in the community. However, most of what we know about hoarding comes from individuals who volunteer for research in university-based settings. Earlier this year, Dr. Woody and her colleagues at the Centre for Collaborative

Research on Hoarding published a study in [Behaviour Research and Therapy](#) investigating how well volunteers in university-based research studies reflect individuals whose cases come to the attention of community agencies. Using data from our own research and that of our colleagues (Drs. Randy Frost, Gail Steketee, and David Tolin) combined with data from community agencies in Vancouver, Hamilton, and Boston, we concluded that people who volunteer for hoarding research may not represent the full spectrum of hoarding as it is encountered by community agencies.

Findings suggest that research volunteers significantly differed from community clients.

Research volunteers were more likely to be women (77%), white (83%), and to have good insight into the problems associated with their hoarding (84%). However, community clients had a more equal gender balance (55% were women), greater racial/ethnic diversity (60% were white) and were less likely to exhibit good awareness (48%) of the severity or potential consequences of their hoarding. Clutter volume in the home also differed, such that, on average, homes belonging to community clients scored 1.5 points higher on the widely-used [Clutter Image Rating](#) scale. In addition, community-referred homes were more likely to have safety risks such as fire hazards (e.g., combustible material stacked close to a heat source) or unhygienic conditions (e.g., pest infestations, overflowing garbage).

These findings show that researchers who rely solely on volunteer participants for hoarding research may not be getting the whole picture. Our collaborations between researchers and community partners may help to bridge the gap to better understand the full range of hoarding.

Read the full report here: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0005796720300061>.

STUDY RECRUITMENT

When BC shut down in March to protect our communities from COVID-19, UBC curtailed all in-person research. We halted our study on the cognitive underpinnings of hoarding and the impact of a cluttered environment on thinking processes. Fortunately, we had already collected a fair amount of data, so we have been working all summer to analyze those data.

In the coming weeks, we will be recruiting front-line service providers who work with hoarding in the community. Via Zoom, we will conduct in-depth interviews and focus groups with people who have many years of on-the-job experience addressing problems related to hoarding. We will also hold focus groups with people with lived experience of hoarding. If you are interested in participating in the interviews or focus groups, send us an email at hoarding@psych.ubc.ca.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



May Luu is a fourth-year student in the UBC Doctoral Programme in Clinical Psychology. Originally from Calgary, May moved to Vancouver in 2015 to attend graduate school. May’s master’s thesis [research](#) documented that 35-72% of community-referred hoarded homes also have indications of squalor, which is more likely in the context of higher clutter volume and poor access to a functioning kitchen or bathroom. With her doctoral dissertation, she has turned to exploring motivations for excessive acquisition among people who hoard.

During her time as a graduate student, May has received numerous awards and fellowships including a competitive SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship to support her PhD work.

In her free time May likes to hike, watch TV, read, and do anything in the water (despite being a “terrible” swimmer!). Some of May’s more unique interests and skills are that she likes worms, and she is so good at hula hooping that she was once asked to demonstrate on TV! May has a very close family and many lifelong friends back in Alberta, where she visits frequently with her husband, Eleazer.



COMMUNITY PARTNER SPOTLIGHT



In this edition of *Pathways*, Niousha Gazor interviewed Deputy Fire Chief Rob Renning of Vancouver Fire Rescue Services. Below is a summary of their interview.

What is the overall mission of the Vancouver Fire Rescue Services?

Building safer communities through partnership, education, and prevention.

What work does your organization do specifically related to hoarding?

We work with various organizations to spend time trying to get the individual with hoarding into a safer state within their home. One of our firefighters will usually team up with one nurse from Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH), to build a relationship with the resident. We may also partner with different groups within the city to address the resident’s specific needs (e.g., working with the engineering department to get bins to help the individual clean up on their own, or working with VCH to supply counselling and treatment options). Although, it’s a very slow process, it seems to work well in the long term.

Why is hoarding something that your organization cares about?

Hoarding presents a significant safety risk for the individual living in the home, in addition to others around them. Years ago, we had some incidents in which people were trapped in their building; they perished in fires because they were unable to get out, with some firefighters getting badly injured trying to enter. Addressing hoarding is ultimately about making the community safer.

What are some of your organization’s innovations around hoarding intervention?

The Hoarding Action Response Team (HART) is a partnership with multiple agencies and departments within the city and was the first team to imbed a health organization (i.e., VCH) as part of the process. Other firefighters may go in and clean it themselves or order a clean-up, but that doesn’t tackle the real root of the problem. Our approach is multi-pronged – we make both the individual and building safer, in addition to working with a health agency to give counselling attention to that individual.

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What is something your organization prides itself on related to hoarding in the community?

We're proud of the fact that we are taking the time to build relationships and make these residents and sometimes entire buildings, safe. We won't participate in any approach that leads to an eviction, rather we ensure that we have a multi-pronged approach to this. We ensure there's always a place for the person to stay until their own home is functional again, if the situation is that severe. We use a slow process to work with individuals as opposed to just evicting them and moving the problem from one building to another.

Why is your partnership with the Centre meaningful?

For us, success is leaving a person safer at the end of the day. If we can leave a resident and their building safer than when we started, that's already a success. We're successfully making a difference in people's lives.

RESOURCES



In each edition of Pathways, we draw your attention to some of the outstanding resources – books, websites, or articles – on hoarding that we hope will be of relevance and value to you.

Hoarding: What Everyone Needs to Know demystifies this complex problem, what it looks like, why it may develop, and how it can be treated, summarizing current scientific and clinical information in this surprisingly easy-to-read volume by two internationally-recognized experts on hoarding.



Hoarding: What Everyone Needs to Know (2020) by Gail Steketee and Christiana Bratiotis

Available September 1st from [Oxford University Press](#) and other book retailers.

LEARN THE LINGO



Given the many terms and definitions related to the concept of hoarding, words are sometimes misinterpreted or used interchangeably. In this section, we hope to clear up confusion about some terms that are commonly misunderstood.

Collecting vs. hoarding. The distinction between collecting and hoarding can be a fine one. Collecting refers to the intentional gathering and saving of a narrowly-defined and curated set of possessions. Strategic organization of a collection makes it easy to locate a particular item and allows use of living spaces for their intended purposes. Collectors will typically give up an item when they acquire a duplicate that is in better condition. Hoarding behaviour involves urges to save a wide variety of objects. The large volume of possessions accumulate in a disorganized manner such that important parts of the home cannot be used for everyday living activities.



ABOUT US

The Centre for Collaborative Research on Hoarding is a multidisciplinary group based in the UBC Department of Psychology. Faculty from the UBC School of Social Work and Departments of Psychology and Sociology work together with our community partners to better understand hoarding and to promote evidence-informed interventions to keep everyone safe and comfortably housed. Our research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and The University of British Columbia.

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