

Domestic Squalor

Janine Johnson Psychology Trainee, BA

Wright State University

Terminology

- **Sylogomania** Tendency to unintentionally accumulate useless rubbish or garbage/waste as a result of not discarding it.
 ~Also referred to as “hoarding of rubbish”

- **Domestic Squalor** Home is unclean, messy and unhygienic due to accumulated dirt, grime, and waste material, along with possible insects and other vermin. Rotting food, excrement and certain odors may cause feelings of revulsion among visitors.

Terminology

- Hoarding Purposeful collection and storage of articles or material which have sentimental value
- Diogenes Syndrome Severe self-neglect in old age
 - Diogenes: ~Greek cynic philosopher
 - ~Man of simplicity, taught the dangers of property
 - ~Repudiated human decency and rejected contemporary standards

Squalor's definition of Squalor

- Squalor is....
 - “Always being late because you can't find a particular pair of pants”
 - “Chaos”
 - “Having great balance because you've learned to dance over heaps of stuff”
 - “Cold & unwelcoming”
 - “Cringing when there's a knock at the door”
 - “Depression made visible”

Squalor is....

- “A home to hide in, not relax”
- “Embarrassment”
- “Objects in place of memories”
- “Fear that I am going crazy”
- “Fear of the knowledge I am screwed up and do not know how to fix it”
- “Going to extreme lengths to make sure no one gets the bright idea to pay you a surprise visit”

Squalor is....

- “Stashing dishes in the oven because washing takes too long”
- “Only one facet of my extraordinary personality!”
- “Not enough space for the things we feel we must keep”
- “Denying myself children because I was afraid I would do to them what my parents did to me, being raised in squalor”
- “Naming your piles Mount Washme”
- “Postponed decisions” “OVERWHELMING”

Types of Squalor

1. Dry, neglectful squalor (dust, unwashed dishes, grimy surfaces, heaps of clothes)
2. Rubbishy, neglectful squalor (waste, discarded glass, containers, bottles, remnants of meals)
3. Wet, neglectful squalor (feces, urine, vomit, spillage, rotting food)
4. Dry clutter (**disorganized** clothes, paper, boxes, videos, purchased items covering most surfaces)
5. Dry extensive clutter or hoarding (accumulation piled to ceiling, inaccessible items)
6. Dry, semi-organized hoarding (“pathways” through piled-up items, mild squalor w/ risk of fire or accident)

Contributing Factors/Causes

- Depressive symptoms/Disorder
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Postpartum Depression
- SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder)
- Physical Problems/Disability (lack of energy, chronic pain, recovery from injury/illness makes keeping up with routines difficult especially for someone who is prone to live in such condition)

Contributing Factors/Causes

- Lack of awareness, absent insight
- Behavioral and Situational
 - Learned behavior
 - Family situations
 - Financial problems (management)
 - Unemployment

Why live in Squalor?

- A state resulting from prolonged neglect of the physical and mental health of the individual and his/her environment
- Reaction late in life to stress, loss of support, retirement, enforced isolation by bereavement (in certain personality types) results in rejection of social standards.

Self-neglect in cases of Squalor

- Inability or refusal to attend adequately to one's own health, hygiene, nutrition or social needs
- Unwillingness to access potentially remediating services
- Refusal or failure to provide himself/herself with adequate food, water, clothing, shelter, personal hygiene, and safety precautions.

Why Squalorees will not ask for help?

- Extreme levels of embarrassment
- Lack of awareness of the degree of the problem at hand
- Financial concerns of receiving psychiatric services, hiring professional organizers and seeking home services.

Responding with Rapid Changes

- Hoarding Task Force – coordinate care (housing, public health, mental health, protective services, aging services, legal, fire and police, animal control)
- Trash Hauler - Rapid change (be aware of consequences)
- Professional Organizers (cost?!!)
 - Minimize Challenges - Depressive states don't respond well to challenges. At times getting up the morning is a challenge.
 - Make it as easy for the individual as possible

Client Refusing Services

- Home=value
- Fear of disruption of their valuable items
- Disrupting their daily routine
- Receiving services puts the client at a vulnerable state
- Objects=feelings. Digging through those items means essentially digging through old feelings.
- Intervention without consent can rupture a persons dignity because what is happening to their home was not in their control.

Interpersonal Strategies

- Use respectful language (Avoid, “What a mess! Who would live like this!”)
- Match their language (Avoid using the label junk, if they see it with value)
- Avoid touching objects in the home (may elicit feelings of violation or possession)
- If there is no rapport with client, do not make suggestions! (poorly received)
- Focus initially on safety then recommendations (donate, sell, recycle, discard)
- Imagine yourself in the clients shoes (embarrassment, anger, frustration)

Dealing with Resistance

- Avoid persuasion and arguing (elicit a defense of the opposite viewpoint)
- Use encouraging language (“You have made good progress, I am really glad you’ve got more room now!”)
- Highlight strengths, everyone has strengths! (notice an ordered room, neatly arrayed books, clean bathroom)
- Praise change efforts liberally (habituated to negative comments about their self and behavior)

Authoritarian Language

Power dynamics: Be conscious of your stimulus value –Power & Privilege

Authoritarian language increases the power dynamic and makes it overt!

Authoritarian language does not empower the client and move toward
voluntary intervention

Decreases their dignity

Belittles the client

What's Preventing them?

- Contributing factors
- The pile is overwhelming
 - Lack of awareness (inability to see the one corner they should start with)
- Avoidance due to embarrassment and procrastination

Procrastination

- Setting Goals (S.M.A.R.T) to be **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**nchored, **R**ealistic, and using a **T**imeline
- Start dates are more effective than finish dates
- Goals do not have to be productive at first (ex. Walk into the disorganized room, then walk out)
- If consequences (punishments) are not effective, use reinforcements

Support Groups

- Develop clientele
- Type of Group: Psychoeducation, Support, Therapy Group
- Goals for Group (change behavior, create awareness, education...)
- Use a pre and post test
 - Pre-test: What would be helpful from the clients to receive in group?
 - Post-test: Was the group helpful? Changes for next time?

Famous Squalorees

- Famous Squalorees
 - Beethoven
 - Katie Holmes
 - Ida Mayfield Wood
 - Langley Collyer
 - Emily Eliza Donnithorne
 - Louis Bonard
 - Mr. Trebus

Fictional Squalors

- Fictional Squalors
 - Oscar from Sesame Street
 - The Seven Dwarves
 - The Cat in the Hat
 - Christina Yang (ABC's *Grey's Anatomy*)
 - Pig Pen
 - Oscar Madison
 - Miss Havisham & Mrs. Jellyby

References

- Bratiotis, C., Schmalisch, C., & Steketee, G. (2011). *The boarding handbook : a guide for human service professionals / Christiana Bratiotis, Cristina Sorrentino Schmalisch, Gail Steketee*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, c2011.
- Snowdon, J., Halliday, G., & Banerjee, S. (2012). *Severe domestic squalor*.
- <http://www.squalorsurvivors.com/index.shtml>