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Why Does Hoarding House Occur?



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Jun Kobayashi*¹, Keiichi Ikeda²

¹Faculty of Nutrition, University of Kochi, 2751-1 Ike, Kochi, Kochi 781-8515, Japan;

²Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Hokuriku University, Ho 3, Kanagawa-machi, Kanazawa, Ishikawa, 920-1181, Japan

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ABSTRACT

A hoarding house is a building or land that is not a garbage accumulation site where garbage is stored until it is stacked outside. In addition to garbage, which is generated and increased by purchases by residents or administrators, garbage may also be carried from nearby garbage accumulation locations. Neighbors may also illegally dump garbage in other people's houses. The amount of garbage continued to increase without being sorted out. The people in the neighborhood feel annoyed and uncomfortable, which develops into social problems. In this study, the cause of the hoarding house problem is presented, and a solution is described. Furthermore, we discuss the problem of hoarding houses overseas and express our opinions.



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INTRODUCTION

A hoarding house is a building (mainly a residence) or land that does not accumulate garbage and is stored until the garbage is placed outside (it often refers to the former from the term)¹⁾. In addition to garbage generated by residents or administrators, they may carry garbage from nearby garbage accumulations, behave as if they are running the recycling industry, and collect garbage. In many cases, they lived in the garbage. As garbage is stored, much of it is placed indoors, and garbage that can no longer be placed indoors is placed outdoors. Subsequently, neighbors other than landlords and landowners revealed garbage. Consequently, the surroundings were recognized as hoarding houses. If garbage is present indoors, it is often recognized only by the residents.

Usually, if the things that are stored are of high monetary value, such as antiques, or if it is recognized that a person's work-related things are temporarily placed there, it is not considered a hoarding house. A sole proprietor who uses his home as a workshop to carve tombstones, maintain gardens, and make wooden furniture may leave stones and logs in his garden. However, no one thinks of them as garbage. Many things look like garbage that should be thrown away or sorted out objectively, and the problem is that they continue to increase without being sorted out, and neighbors feel annoyed and uncomfortable.

Hoarding houses have become a major social problem in Japan. In some cases, it is considered to be related to disease and residence form¹⁾. The issue of ownership is debatable. It is often featured in mass media, such as TV, and there are plans to clean celebrity rooms on variety shows. However, there are many such cases, and very few are made visible by the media. This article explains what a hoarding house is and why it is problematic. We believe that such problems are becoming more serious outside of Japan; therefore, we would like to offer our opinion on the available solutions.

Problem with the hoarding house

In many reported cases, many people (residents) who create hoarded houses are owners of the land and houses themselves, and there are few wealthy people who own multiple real estate properties in the surrounding area. This is not necessarily caused by being financially in need of personal belongings or having no personal belongings. Many were older and living alone

(married but living separately, divorced, widowed, or single). It can occur in single-family houses and multi-family housing, such as mansions and apartment complexes. They often have few or no close acquaintances or friends, are estranged from relatives, and are isolated from the local population. Such social isolation is thought to be the root cause of hoarding. Once it becomes hoarding, it becomes difficult for residents to clean it up by themselves, and because there is no one around to help them, it worsens, falling into a vicious cycle. This background is the reason why it is recognized as a social problem.

Generally, many people judge garbage as worthless or low. However, even what is considered garbage has legal ownership. Even if a third party sees that garbage has piled up, if residents claim it is not garbage, it is difficult for neighbors or the government to intervene and forcibly remove it. Especially in the case of private land, if others enter without a justifiable reason, they will be charged with trespassing, making it more difficult to solve problems. There is a situation in which the government and the people around them cannot move unless there is an impact on public or shared spaces.

A private house or real estate property that has been left unattended for a long time without a resident has been illegally dumped repeatedly by neighbors, and the resident has left it without taking countermeasures, resulting in a hoarding house. Currently, in Japan, home appliances such as refrigerators and TVs that are no longer used must be disposed of as garbage for a fee²⁾. In some cases, people break the law and throw it away in deserted forests or public places because they want to throw it away for free without spending money. This was caused by the lack of morals and the illegal behavior of the residents (probably a very small number of people) and not by the owner/resident of the hoarding house.

The presence of garbage not only spoils the landscape but also causes damage to nearby residents due to offensive odors, rats, and insects (sanitary pests). Furthermore, it is regarded as a problem because it is easy to encounter crimes such as arson. If garbage is left unattended, it rots, and a bad smell spreads around; secondarily, many cockroaches and flies occur. The health of not only the people who collect garbage but also their surroundings is adversely affected, and the possibility of contracting various diseases (e.g., pneumonia and tuberculosis) increases. Because a large amount of garbage accumulates in a hoarding house at a high density, it is dangerous because it can lead to a fire with a small spark and spread quickly³⁾. This could be due to the

carelessness of the resident, suspicion, or arson. These are mainly reported on TV station-wide shows and news, and are questioned as social problems (such as problems in human relations).

Why do hoarding houses occur?

There are various reasons for the occurrence of hoarding houses, but the cases that are often reported in the media are mainly the examples shown in Table 1. It can be divided into cases where the cause is various things of the residents and cases where neighbors cause it. Residents are considered to have multiple causes, such as mental and emotional problems, economic reasons, behavior and time usage at work, and diseases. For spiritual reasons, one acquires many things due to escalating one's material desires; however, one's inability to discard one's previous possessions results in an increase in garbage. For the residents themselves, it may have been that they simply collected what they wanted to do. An increase in possession through purchases (possessiveness) may eliminate daily anxiety and stress. People who are unemployed or have reached retirement age may find life satisfaction by spending long hours on the act of collecting as if they were working. The fact that the surroundings do not objectively indicate that the conditions are not good further accelerates this situation. Lack of communication with neighbors and a lack of thinking about causing inconvenience to neighbors may be the causes. Even if the foul odor or landscape deterioration from a certain house is a nuisance to the surroundings, the residents may not notice it. This may overlap with pathological factors such as weakening and paralysis of the five senses. For economic reasons, people who think they do not have enough money think it is a waste to throw things away, or they dislike spending money and pick up a lot of garbage and put it in their houses. For example, if people read a book once, sell it, throw it away, and buy it again when they need it, they do not need to increase their sense of belonging. The thought of waste and the anxiety of not being able to obtain it hinders its disposal. For work-related reasons, it is difficult to secure time to dispose of garbage, and it is difficult to properly determine whether it is garbage; therefore, it becomes impossible to discard things. Another reason is that when you go shopping, because residents cannot remember what they have at home, they may buy things they already have, which end up in the garbage. Dementia and forgetfulness may also be causes. Neighbors often see illegal dumping. If garbage already exists, the psychology that residents can put their own garbage there will play out, and the amount of garbage will increase synergistically.

Are there hoarding houses overseas?

In Japan, the topic of hoarding houses and dirty rooms is sometimes brought up on TV news programs. However, what about the situation of hoarding houses overseas? Hoarding is an abnormal behavior (hoarding syndrome) that has been reported around the world³⁾. In foreign countries, household goods, items collected from somewhere, and garbage are piled up on the premises of one's house or in one room of an apartment building. There are an increasing number of cases where there is no place to step on garbage, and eventually, it becomes a hoarding house. These procedures are the same as those used in Japan.

In 2017, in Seoul, South Korea, an accident occurred in which a man in his 40s living in a hoarding house died after being buried in garbage³⁾. The site of the house, which was known as a hoarding house among the neighbors, was piled up with a large amount of various things and garbage collected from here and there by a mother in her 60s who ran an antique dealer. The items that were planned to be sold had been left unused for a long time and gave off a foul odor, prompting neighbors to demand that garbage be removed (the person wants to sell it, but since it has not actually sold, people around him perceive it as garbage).

Around 1900, the brothers, who were living a good life in Manhattan, USA, quit their jobs and retired to their houses³⁾. They lived in a house where water and electricity had been cut off and lived while scavenging garbage. They carried various objects to their homes and hoarded them. Two patients later died in the house. The incident was revealed after a resident called the police. After their deaths, 120 tons of collectibles and garbage were removed from their residences.

Even in the UK, the hoarding house problem has become a focus of attention³⁾. The TV program about cleaning up the hoarding house introduces the various circumstances that the residents of the hoarding house have, how they clean up the hoarding house, how they start collecting garbage and focuses on the psychological problems of the residents of the hoarding house. While Japanese TV shows show celebrities cleaning up as part of their variety shows, this may be because they place a greater emphasis on documentary quality.

There are several reasons why Japan is more prone to problems than overseas (particularly in Europe and the United States). Houses are often smaller than those in the UK, and many residents live in collective housing such as mansions and apartment complexes (in Asia, the same

thing as in Japan can happen in a small living space). Because gardens and garages are small, and there are many shared spaces, it is necessary to communicate with neighbors and compromise. Residents must also think objectively about what will happen to their surroundings if garbage is collected. If it is judged that many people cannot maintain an objective point of view, there may be a situation where the whole cannot be controlled unless detailed rules for groups are stipulated by the neighborhood and residents' associations. This is also related to the characteristics of the people in each country. Japanese people tend to think that letting people do as they please will cause trouble for their surroundings, and they tend to think that it is better to be bound by rules.

Responses and solutions to hoarding houses

Thus far, we have described the factors that lead to many hoarding houses. How can we solve the garbage dumping problem? An overview of this process is presented in Table 2. There are self-initiated actions (requiring the residents' own actions) and other-initiated actions (requiring the support of surroundings). In any case, it is believed that removing the cause of hoarding houses will lead to a fundamental solution. Elderly people living alone often accumulate garbage and become ill. It is necessary to create opportunities for others to enter and exit the house and create an environment where it is easy to throw away garbage (not accumulate it). If a resident has a family member who lives with them or a helper who visits regularly, the isolation caused by living alone can be alleviated; however, if not, the problem will be difficult to solve. If residents feel even the slightest uneasy, they may need to talk to friends or family members. One method is to clean friends and family members. If residents have an environment where they can remove garbage 24 hours a day, such as in an apartment building, there is no problem, but if that is not the case, they will have to get up early in the morning to remove garbage. If residents continue to do so, removing garbage itself will become troublesome and turn into a hoarding house. One way to do this is to move to a house with convenient facilities for removing garbage; however, in many cases, nothing progresses unless people make up their minds and act independently. It is important to know what residents think and what they do not want to do. Residents can change their refrigerator to a smaller one and buy only what they can fit inside or only buy seasonings and detergents that can fit in the storage space of their locker. The residents can devise their own resources. No matter how much the surroundings say that it is better if there is no garbage and if

they want residents to clean it up, it may not solve the problem. These are the possible self-initiated solutions.

Representative examples of solutions that others act on are the governmental⁴⁾. The contents of the ordinances differ depending on the local government; however, if there is a request from a nearby resident, the local government will conduct an investigation, and if it is regarded as a hoarding house, advice, guidance, and recommendations will be provided (the so-called hoarding house ordinance). If the residents of the hoarding house do not obey them, they will give orders; if they do not obey them, they will finally be executed by an administrative agency. Administrative agency execution is the forcible removal or exclusion of residents who do not fulfill their orders or obligations by administrative agencies on their behalf. Evictions and garbage removal are carried out using an administrative budget, which is tax-funded. Although it is possible to implement countermeasures, such as bylaws, that do not increase damage, this may not be a complete solution. Sometimes, the sense of ownership is low, so help from family and friends is necessary.

CONCLUSION

This article describes the problems associated with hoarding houses, the reasons for their occurrence, and solutions. Hoarding houses causes various problems for the residents and the surroundings, such as discomfort due to offensive odors and large numbers of pests, the risk of fires, and health hazards. There are physical reasons for creating a hoarding house, such as aging, illness, disability, and busy work; however, there are also mental causes, such as loneliness, isolation, loss, and anxiety. Additionally, we showed that hoarding houses occur in Japan and other countries. A hoarding house is created by accumulating garbage. When residents see the state, it is perceived differently from its surroundings. It is often perceived as self-neglect from the perspective of those around you¹⁾. This is because it is possible to perceive that the residents accumulate garbage to harm themselves, deteriorate their health, and create conditions that make them disliked by others. It is possible that residents do not consider the things they have accumulated to be garbage, and the reasons for hoarding them are diverse, such as the collection of things they want. It is difficult to explain all specific examples in this article. Even if others clean up without permission, this will not be a fundamental solution unless residents want to do so. The process of hoarding the house was repeated. For residents to solve their problems by

themselves, it is necessary to fill in the gaps in their perceptions of others and have people around them stand by them. It may be necessary to progressively clean the areas in which visitors to their houses are comfortable or to at least initially sympathize that what residents collect is meaningful and not garbage. Each of these is not a big solution, but by applying various methods over time, the result may be a complete solution and understanding of the surroundings.

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Table 1 Causes leading to hoarding house occurrence

Reason type	Example	Supplement	
By a resident of the garbage house	Anger at being dumped illegally on your property.	Because residents want to deter other people's actions, their own actions escalate (residents would rather put their own garbage on their own land than throw away their garbage).	
	Anxiety about one's property due to distrust of the community and relatives.	Untrustworthy of close people, so excessively increasing personal belongings and spending money.	
	Get a sense of accomplishment for their collection. A lot to buy.	If residents buy more things than they need, items will increase in the house. Most of them are for stress relief. Residents have a strong attachment to objects. Due to the mentality of being wasteful, he accumulates garbage and turns it into a hoarding house. Residents often feel uneasy about letting go of purchased items, and if someone else simply cleans up, they may impulsively buy things again due to their uneasiness, and the situation may be restored.	
	Feeling guilty about disposing.		
	Alienation and isolation from the local community.	If residents don't recognize that their room is littered with garbage, they won't clean it unless someone is around to take care of it. It is often seen in people who live alone and never invite friends to their houses.	
	Economic	Financial distress.	Collecting the 4 items subject to the Home Appliance Recycling Law for a fee, saving the cost of purchasing garbage bags.
	Occupational	Inappropriate management due to inventory increase by antique dealers.	Although residents want to clean up, one can't find time because one's busy with work, childcare, and housework, and the amount of garbage gradually increases.
		No time to clean up.	
	Pathological	Can't put out the garbage because life is irregular.	
		Collecting habits become pathologically high. Mental disorders such as attention deficit disorder (ADHD) and dementia.	As residents get older and dementia progresses, they buy the same things a lot, or one doesn't know when to put out the garbage, so garbage accumulates in one's room, turning it into a hoarding house.
By neighbors	Illegal dumping of vacant houses and vacant land by neighbors.	As a result of the psychology that it is okay to throw their garbage where there is already garbage, other people's garbage is also placed in the same place.	

Based on the contents of reference 4).

Table 2 Example of hoarding house solution

	Solution type	Commentary
Self-initiated actions	Clean up with friends or family.	If residents feel uneasy, talk to a friend or family member first. Even if residents can't do it alone, cleaning up with someone close to them is highly effective, such as a friend or family member.
	Move house.	When residents move, they must pack their belongings and discard unnecessary items. Create an environment where residents can take out the garbage 24 hours a day.
	Ask a specialist for improvement.	If residents can't clean it up by themselves and don't want to move, it's one way to ask a professional contractor. It costs money, but professional experts clean it up neatly in a short time. However, it is the resident who decides the request.
Other-initiated actions	Force others to create a situation where others enter the resident's house / make by themselves.	If there is an environment where family members and helpers visit, they may not accumulate garbage / throw it away.
	Stop the landscape before it is damaged by rules such as laws.	If garbage protrudes into the common space, the garbage may be removed with the community's consent.

Based on the contents of reference 4).

