

# PATHWAYS

A Hoarding Research Partnership Publication

2021

Winter/Spring

## DIRECTOR'S CORNER



Crocuses and daffodils offer the promise of spring at the end of a winter that has been particularly dark for many. As the flowers open and offer hope for what's next, our research projects are

also in early bloom. Though we wish we were together and in-person on our beautiful UBC campus, the *Centre for Collaborative Research on Hoarding* team has been working remotely and advancing several projects in our research partnership. Most notably, this fall we conducted two studies – a comprehensive scoping review of the literature and expert interviews, both aimed at systematizing our understanding of harm reduction for hoarding practices. Findings from these interesting studies and how they are being used in our next phases of research will be featured in future issues of *Pathways* – stay tuned! Meanwhile, preliminary details of the Expert Interviews can be found in the Research Updates section of this issue.

Happy Spring,

**Christiana Bratiotis, PhD, MSW**  
**Associate Director**



UBC Centre for Collaborative  
Research on Hoarding

## RESEARCH UPDATES



Although members of our partnership are well aware of harm reduction in hoarding, the broader community knows few of the strategies that human service providers adopt to address potential risks associated with hoarding. Largely through their on-the-job experience, front-line workers become experts, earning specialized knowledge about hoarding intervention. During the fall of 2020, the *Centre* conducted an Expert Interviews study to learn more about harm reduction through the eyes of professionals with many years of experience in hoarding intervention.

Senior investigators from our team interviewed 14 experts from Canada, the USA, and Australia. The experts represented diverse fields: fire prevention, nursing, housing, mental health, older adult psychiatry, legal services, environmental health, social work, and community hoarding networks. Experts explained how they identify and prioritize harm reduction goals and the details of how they work with other professionals and the client to implement interventions ranging from decluttering assistance to clean-outs.

The audio recordings of the interviews have now been transcribed and verified. In the coming months, our team will analyze them to identify common and divergent themes of these experts' perspectives and practices. We look forward to sharing the results with our partners and with the broader community.

## RECENT CENTRE PROJECTS



Most research on hoarding has been conducted in high-income western countries with an individualistic cultural frame, so little is known about whether and how hoarding might differ in low-income collectivistic

countries. In December 2020 during a visit to her family home, Priyam Joshi, a research assistant at the *Centre*, investigated how hoarding is identified, conceptualized, and treated in India. Drawing upon her personal and professional network, she interviewed 11 mental health workers who encounter hoarding in their practice. Her semi-structured interviews were focused on hoarding assessment, impacts, clinical treatment, and cultural influences.

Findings from this study suggest that with few exceptions, clients' families bring them for clinical treatment, with the chief complaint being the client's depression or anger rather than the hoarding. Assessment is based on clinical interviews and family reports rather than direct observation of the home, due to legal issues and lack of resources. Interestingly, clients are most often brought in for treatment when squalor is present alongside the hoarding behaviour. Perhaps accordingly, professionals perceive pest infestations as the most significant community risk. Based on these professionals' reports, families commonly do regular cleaning against the client's wishes, leading to traumatic stress and additional family conflict.

Indian society is sociocentric, meaning that there is a strong focus on social cohesion, hierarchy, and interdependence. The most typical living arrangement is with extended families in multigenerational dwellings. Furthermore, widespread economic insecurities have cultivated a strong "saving" culture among families. All of these factors impact the identification, perception, and treatment-seeking of hoarding disorder. Especially in a country with a scarcity of mental health services, the family, if given proper psychoeducation, seems to have potential to be a good source of support, security, and encouragement to the client.

Lack of awareness about hoarding as an illness, scarce mental health resources, and stigma surrounding psychological treatment leads to underdiagnosis of hoarding in India, with unknown personal and public health implications. In the coming weeks, Priyam will conduct additional interviews with professionals who are living in India and working with hoarding. Please reach out to her at [priyam.joshi@ubc.ca](mailto:priyam.joshi@ubc.ca) if you would like to know more about this project.

## STUDY RECRUITMENT

Hoarding interventions are not easy or straightforward, and community service providers are always looking for ways to improve the quality of their work. Our partnership is developing an innovative assessment tool to improve hoarding intervention by focusing on:

- Identification and prioritization of risks in the home and to the person,
- Consistent communication with shared language among service providers,
- Coordination of care that prioritizes the highest risks.

Your specialized knowledge can help pave the way for improved community interventions for hoarding. We need your (and your colleagues') front-line expertise on hoarding to consult on the development of this assessment tool!

To learn more about this assessment tool and join the consultation, check out our website:

<https://hoarding.psych.ubc.ca/partners>

*Hoarding Measurement Development  
Online Consultations Project  
PI: Dr. Sheila Woody*

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Kate Kysow is a third-year student in the UBC Doctoral Programme in Clinical Psychology. She has been working with the Centre since 2015. As a graduate student, Kate has received numerous awards, including the prestigious UBC Public Scholar Award. Her master's research focused on characterizing hoarding clients served by the Hoarding Action Response Team (HART) in Vancouver in terms of client demographics, interventions the team used, and their outcomes. For her doctoral dissertation, Kate is studying the clean-out interventions for hoarding: what

that means, what circumstances necessitate them, and client experiences and perspectives.

Here is a “backstage” glimpse at some of Kate’s more unique interests: she has choreographed three flash mobs and has performed several times for childrens’ parties as Elsa from *Frozen*, which led her to consider starting a birthday party business! Kate expresses gratitude for our community partners:

*“Thank you for all the work you do for community hoarding clients. I really appreciate how dedicated you are to working on a problem that doesn’t have many resources or clear-cut answers for how to intervene. I love learning about the work you do. Thank you for motivating me over the past 6 years of my research.”*



## COMMUNITY PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS

In this edition of *Pathways*, Priyam Joshi interviewed Alda Melo, Occupational Therapist of the Community and Home Assistance to Seniors organization. Below is a summary of their interview.



### What is the overall mission of your organization?

Community and Home Assistance to Seniors (CHATS) delivers high-quality home and community services and experiences for older adults and caregivers so that clients can live at home independently, safely, and with dignity.

### How does CHATS work with hoarding?

The **Tenancy Risk Reduction Service to Seniors (TRRSS)** program at CHATS aims to decrease the risk of tenancy loss. The program supports individuals living in cluttered environments with low to moderate income. We use a harm reduction approach to reduce risks and to address hoarding behaviors. The focus is on using a client-centered perspective to create customized service plans and coordinate teams to address clients' specific needs. Every client gets an assessment, care coordination, and hands-on support for clutter reduction throughout the program. Other service components include mental health case management, occupational therapy, client advocacy, and minor repairs to the home.

### Why is hoarding something that CHATS cares about?

Hoarding is a serious problem that poses health and safety risks to the individuals living with hoarding and to others living in the home and communities at large. Social service agencies are increasingly identifying older adults who are at risk of losing their tenancy due to hoarding, unclean, cluttered, and unmaintained homes. At CHATS, we are committed to our clients being able to live at home safely.

### Tell me about an innovative aspect of the CHATS approach to helping clients with hoarding.

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in partnership with VHA Home Healthcare and funding from Community Foundations of Canada, we recently created the **Remote Engagement Advocacy and Collaboration for Hoarding (REACH)** project to be able to provide virtual care for our clients with hoarding behaviours. Through video conferencing, the program provides structured groups, such as Buried with Treasures, an 8-week clutter support group, assessment, decluttering sessions, and post in-home service maintenance support. REACH has been successful in expanding client’s support options and decreasing isolation during the pandemic”.

*Continues on page 4*

## What is something CHATS prides itself on related to hoarding in the community?

TRRSS has grown so much in the last few years! We began the program in 2014, and we are the only hoarding program in the York (Ontario) region. Initially, we provided services only to individuals with hoarding and their families. Since then, TRRSS has expanded to providing education, training, and outreach on hoarding to the community, including housing providers, legal aid agencies, and mental health providers.

## How is your partnership with the Centre meaningful?

Partnering with the Centre allows us to contribute to the development of new knowledge about hoarding and learn more about community-based interventions. It also provides for a wide range of knowledge, best practices, and information sharing. We aim to deliver the right type of service to our clients at the right time, and we firmly believe that this partnership can support us to continue to do that.

## RESOURCES



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

This month, we reviewed podcasts that discuss hoarding from different perspectives. Here are a few of our favourites.

1. [Hoarding Stuff](#) is a series that captures the rich, thoughtful and entertaining conversations between a service provider and a service user. Both people with lived experience of hoarding and professionals who work with hoarding can learn something here.
2. [inSocialWork](#) hosted Dr. Gail Steketeer to discuss hoarding disorder. This episode (No. 59) provides a comprehensive overview of the topic – great for listeners who do not yet know much hoarding.
3. [Revisionist History](#) is a popular podcast. Episode 1 of Season 5 included interviews with Dr. Randy Frost and other guests to explore object saving in museums and in households. Listeners will enjoy thinking about the bigger picture of keeping stuff.

## LEARN THE LINGO



*In this section, we hope to clear up confusion about some commonly misunderstood terms and definitions related to the concept of hoarding.*

### Hoarding vs. Squalor

Although many people use these terms interchangeably, they do refer to different things.

**Hoarding** involves strong urges to save objects that results in large volumes of stuff (such as papers, clothing) filling the home so much that daily activities become difficult. **Domestic squalor**, in contrast, refers to unsanitary conditions in the home, such as filth, pest or rodent infestation, rotting food, or mould. **How are they related?** Having a great number of objects can get in the way of housekeeping, so squalor can be a consequence. Animal hoarding almost always involves squalor. **How do they differ?**

Many hoarded homes are clean and sanitary, despite being very full of stuff.



## 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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*Pathways Newsletter Editors:  
Patricia Jiang, Priyam Joshi, May Luu*

We bid a fond farewell to our colleague and friend Peter Lenkic who has served as Research Coordinator and Data Management Guru for the Centre during the past five years.

We wish Peter all the best in his new endeavours and thank him for his devoted and skilled work.