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Animal Hoarding

When faced with the words “Animal Hoarding” society often paints a picture of a person sitting in the middle of an unkempt house full of cats, when in reality there is so much more.

Animal hoarding can be defined by three main characteristics which are: (*Dosh, 2011*)

1. A person with tendencies to hoard more animals than they can handle,
2. Are not able to properly care for the animals basic living needs, and
3. In denial that they are causing any harm to their animals

Along with the three main characteristics there are three different types of hoarders. These categories are Exploit hoarders, Rescue hoarders, and Overwhelmed hoarders. An Exploit hoarder is a type of animal hoarder that hoards for ones own wants and self needs; they are also oblivious to the harm caused to the animals and themselves. This type of hoarder is often very controlling. Rescue Hoarders often have a compulsion disorder that causes them to feel the need to ‘save’ the animals from euthanasia and/or death. These hoarders feel as if they are the only ones capable of helping the animals; this causes them to obtain as many animals as possible. An Overwhelmed hoarder is a hoarder who

usually provides respectable care for the animals they own.

Although there are different types of animal hoarders they all hoard animals. These animals range from exotics to house hold animals. Animal Planet estimates about 250,000 animals become victims of hoarding each year(*Animal Planet,2010*). Cats and dogs are about sixty five percent of the animals hoarded, farm animals are ten percent and exotic animals make up a very small amount of animals hoarded. In 2004 a man by the name of Paul Keller had the remains of 100 cows, horses, goats, and pigs on his California ranch. Authorities found thirty-two exotic animals from eleven different species in Angela Ancampora's mobile home in West Virginia (*Patronek,2001*).

With the large number of different species of animals that are hoarded there is also a vast number of zoonotic diseases that can be transferred. A zoonotic disease is a disease that can either be transferred from animal to human, or vice-versa (*tufts.edu*). An example of a zoonotic disease is psittacosis, which is a highly deadly and contagious disease that can be transferred from infected birds. The most commonly known zoonotic disease is Rabies. Rabies is easily transmitted through saliva of an infected animal which is most commonly transferred by a bite. The Rabies virus attacks the spinal cord and the brain, it begins to cause flu like symptoms, if not treated the human or animal will have hallucinations and insomnia this is when the infected becomes 'rabid.' Once either a human or animal show signs of the disease the survival rate is rare. The CDC reported: less than 10 documented cases of human survival from clinical rabies have been reported.The reason why rabies is so dangerous is because all mammals are susceptible to the virus, and many commonly hoarded animals such as; rats,

dogs, raccoons are the most frequent carriers. Besides rabies another common zoonotic disease is salmonella which is commonly known as food poisoning that causes abdominal cramps, diarrhea and a fever. It is not fatal but if left untreated can cause serious health problems like dehydration. Salmonella is most commonly transferred from birds and lizards.

In light of zoonotic diseases other health hazards in hoarding houses is the quality of air. Many times when a house is raided the HAZMAT(Hazardous Materials) officers are required to wear protective gear that often includes a full body suit and a respiratory mask. The most common air contaminant is ammonia which is produced by the decay of animal waste, and in most hoarding situations sanitation is not a priority to the hoarder. Ammonia is a great irritant to eyes and the upper respiratory track, if the concentration level is very high and is considered “Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health.” (*Animal Hoarding and Public Health,2010*) Ammonia levels are easy to fix that even by simply opening a window can lower the levels significantly. In some situations where fecal matter is greatly accumulated Bio-aerosols is common, which is a lesser know air contaminant which affects humans and is still under study.

Air quality plays a significant role in the health of the animals, most animals in hoarding cases are diseased and injured. A 1999 study conducted by Dr. Patronek found that animals were reportedly found dead or suffering from “Obvious disease or injury” in eighty percent of hoarding cases reviewed (*Patronek,2001*).

Even though the community likes to view animal hoarding as a ‘life style choice’, it is often caused or followed by a number of reasons:

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1. History or victim of child or adult abuse,

2. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and,
3. Dementia. (*Peta & animalhoarding.com, 2011*)

The most common reason for a person to become an animal hoarder is due to the involvement in some type of adult or child abuse. This is because the hoarder often has feelings of loneliness and despair in their life that needs to be filled. They will commonly say that they 'love' the animals, but this is a common myth. The hoarder might have the mind set of loving the animals, but in reality are doing it subconsciously for their own needs (*TLC, My Strange Addiction, 2012*). Obsessive Compulsive Disorder is also another background reason for animal hoarding. These people have the tendency to want to be in control constantly; this causes them to feel that they must be the ones to save the animals. That they are the only ones that can give them adequate care. (*animalhoarding.com*) The third symptom that often causes or accompanies animal hoarding is Dementia. Dementia by definition is, "a loss of brain function that occurs with certain diseases. It affects memory, thinking, language, judgment, and behavior." This is harmful because the hoarders can no longer make the better judgment on how they are treating the animals (*NCBI, 2012*)

Due to the reasons and dangers of animal hoarding, it has forced many states to make their animal cruelty laws very strict. Utah, Illinois, and Hawaii have some of the toughest animal cruelty laws in the United States. Utah's animal cruelty laws are very detailed. Any harm caused to an animal in Utah is classified as a Class C or B misdemeanor (*asci.uvm.edu, 2001*). In 2001 Governor George, Ryan signed

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Illinois Senate Bill 626. This bill states anyone person who violates Article three (which says: Anyone person who can't provide the proper care to their animals because of the large

amount obtained) can be convicted of a class four Felony(*Chicago-Kent Law, 2012*) During the year 2008 Hawaii passed Senate Bill 3203, Which states:

1. A person commits the offense of animal hoarding if the person intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly;
 - (a) Possesses more than fifteen dogs, cats, or a combination of dogs and cats;
 - (b) Fails to provide necessary sustenance for each dog or cat; and
 - (c) Fails to correct the conditions under which the dogs or cats are living where conditions injurious to the dogs', cats', or owners health and well-being the persons failure to provide necessary sustenance.
- (2) Animal hoarding is a misdemeanor (*Chicago-Kent Law, 2010*).

Considering there are certain laws to prevent animal cruelty, there are three different ways an animal hoarder can receive help. Those reasons are:

1. Intervention,
2. Psychiatric Care and
3. Therapy.

What an intervention does is, it helps the hoarder become aware of the problem. The way in which this works is members of their family will sit down with the hoarder and tell them how the issues

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caused from animal hoarding are not only hurting the hoarder themselves but the family around them.

This is the most effective way because most people refrain from any activity that will cause harm to their families. Psychiatric Care takes place when the animal hoarder has a severe mental disorder that needs professional medical help. Therapy is used to help show the animal hoarders that it's okay to have feelings of loneliness but, hoarding the animals is not the way they are going to rid themselves of that pain(*Tuft University,2002*). All of these solutions help the animal hoarders realize that by keeping the animals they are giving them the same pain they are trying to get rid of and in turn most of them can luckily realize that through these methods.

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