

# A Narrative Review on the Association Between Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder and Hoarding Behaviour

**Nigisha v v**

2nd year msc nursing student  
Rajiv Gandhi University of health science ,Bangalore

## **GUIDE:**

Mr LYSON C VIJIN DHAS, M.Sc.(N)  
HOD, Mental Health Nursing  
Shree Devi College of Nursing

## **CO-GUIDE:**

Dr. (Mrs.) Darling B. Bibiana, Ph. D.(N)  
Head of Department  
Principal  
Shree Devi College of Nursing

## **ABSTRACT**

Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a chronic psychiatric illness characterized by obsessions and compulsions that cause significant distress and functional impairment. Hoarding behaviour, once considered a subtype of OCD, is now recognized as a distinct diagnostic entity due to its unique clinical, cognitive, and neurobiological features. However, substantial overlap exists between OCD and hoarding behaviour, particularly in symptom presentation, course, and treatment response. This narrative review examines existing research evidence on the association between OCD and hoarding behaviour, focusing on prevalence, shared mechanisms, distinguishing features, and treatment implications. The review aims to support nursing students, clinicians, and researchers in understanding this relationship and improving mental health assessment and care.

## **Keywords:**

Obsessive–compulsive disorder, hoarding behaviour, hoarding disorder, compulsions, mental health nursing

## **INTRODUCTION**

Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a debilitating mental disorder marked by recurrent intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviours or mental acts (compulsions) performed to alleviate anxiety. Hoarding behaviour involves persistent difficulty discarding possessions regardless of their actual value, leading to cluttered living spaces and impaired functioning. Historically, hoarding was conceptualized as a symptom dimension of OCD and classified under OCD spectrum disorders. However, accumulating clinical and neurobiological evidence has led to the recognition of hoarding disorder as a separate diagnosis in DSM-5. Despite this distinction, the frequent co-occurrence of OCD and hoarding behaviour suggests a meaningful association that warrants careful examination.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE REVIEW

1. To describe hoarding behaviour in relation to obsessive–compulsive disorder
2. To review research evidence on the association between OCD and hoarding behaviour
3. To identify shared and distinct clinical characteristics
4. To discuss implications for mental health nursing practice and research

## METHODS

A narrative review methodology was adopted. Literature published between 2000 and 2024 was searched using PubMed, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, and ScienceDirect. Keywords used included obsessive–compulsive disorder, hoarding behaviour, hoarding disorder, compulsive hoarding, and OCD spectrum disorders. Empirical studies, reviews, neurobiological research, and treatment outcome studies were included.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 1. Conceptual Relationship Between OCD and Hoarding

Early diagnostic frameworks classified hoarding as a subtype of OCD due to similarities in repetitive behaviours and anxiety-driven decision-making. Studies reported that a significant proportion of individuals with OCD exhibit hoarding symptoms, often accompanied by poor insight and increased functional impairment.

### 2. Prevalence of Hoarding Behaviour in OCD

Research indicates that 18–40% of individuals diagnosed with OCD demonstrate clinically significant hoarding symptoms. Patients with hoarding features tend to have earlier illness onset, higher chronicity, and greater social and occupational dysfunction compared to non-hoarding OCD patients.

### 3. Cognitive and Neurobiological Correlates

Neuroimaging studies reveal both shared and distinct neural pathways. While OCD commonly involves dysfunction in orbitofrontal-striatal circuits, hoarding behaviour shows altered activation in the anterior cingulate cortex and insula, particularly during decision-making related to discarding possessions. These findings support partial independence of hoarding from OCD.

### 4. Clinical Characteristics and Insight

Individuals with hoarding behaviour often display poor insight, strong emotional attachment to possessions, and avoidance of decision-making. In contrast, many OCD patients retain partial insight into the irrational nature of their symptoms. These differences contribute to diagnostic challenges and treatment resistance.

### 5. Treatment Response and Outcomes

Standard OCD treatments such as exposure and response prevention (ERP) show reduced effectiveness in patients with prominent hoarding symptoms. Studies support the use of modified cognitive-behavioural therapy, motivational interviewing, and skills-based interventions for hoarding behaviour.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING PRACTICE

- Nurses play a crucial role in early identification of hoarding behaviour among OCD patients
- Comprehensive assessment should include clutter severity, insight level, and functional impairment
- Psychoeducation for patients and families improves engagement and adherence
- Community mental health nurses can assist with home-based assessment and follow-up
- Multidisciplinary collaboration is essential for effective management

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Longitudinal research on progression from OCD to hoarding disorder
- Development of hoarding-specific nursing assessment tools
- Culturally sensitive community-based interventions
- Increased focus on preventive mental health strategies

## CONCLUSION

The association between obsessive–compulsive disorder and hoarding behaviour is complex and multifactorial. Although hoarding disorder is now recognized as a distinct diagnosis, significant overlap with OCD remains in clinical presentation and underlying mechanisms. Understanding this relationship is essential for accurate diagnosis, effective treatment, and improved nursing care. Mental health nurses are uniquely positioned to contribute to early detection, patient education, and long-term management.

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