

Short communication

Hoarding in a compulsive buying sample

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Abstract

Previous research has indicated that many compulsive buyers also suffer from compulsive hoarding. The present work specifically examined hoarding in a compulsive buying sample. Sixty-six treatment-seeking compulsive buyers were assessed prior to entering a group therapy for compulsive buying using the Compulsive Buying Scale (CBS), the Yale–Brown Obsessive–Compulsive Scale (Y-BOCS)-Shopping Version, the Compulsive Acquisition Scale (CAS), the German-CBS, the Saving Inventory-Revised (SI-R), the Maudsley Obsessive Compulsive Inventory (MOCI), the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11), and the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Axis I (SCID). Inclusion criteria were current problems with compulsive buying according to the proposed diagnostic criteria for compulsive buying by McElroy, Keck, Pope, Smith, and Strakowski [(1994). Compulsive buying: A report of 20 cases. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 55, 242–248].

Our results support the assumption that many but not all compulsive buyers suffer from compulsive hoarding. A significant association between the SI-R and the compulsive buying measures CBS, Y-BOCS-SV, German-CBS, and the CAS-Buy subscale was found, which is mostly caused by the SI-R subscale *acquisition*. The SI-R subscales *clutter* and *difficulty discarding* were more closely associated with the CAS-Free subscale and with obsessive–compulsive symptoms. Hoarding compulsive buyers reported more severe buying symptoms and obsessive–compulsive symptoms and presented with a higher psychiatric co-morbidity, especially any current affective, anxiety and eating disorder. Specific therapeutic interventions for compulsive buyers who also report compulsive hoarding appear indicated.

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Introduction

Compulsive buying is described as chronic, repetitive purchasing behaviour that is difficult to stop, causes marked distress, and results in harmful consequences (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992). Koran, Faber, Aboujaoude, Large, and Serpe (2006) estimated the point prevalence of compulsive buying in the United States to be 5.8%. This behaviour was first described by Kraepelin (1909) and Bleuler (1923). Research on this phenomenon has

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increased over the last 20 years and has been reviewed in several recent publications (e.g., Black, 2007; Kuzma & Black, 2004; Müller, Reinecker, Jacobi, Reisch, & de Zwaan, 2005). McElroy et al. (1994, p. 247) proposed the following diagnostic criteria for compulsive buying:

- Maladaptive preoccupation with buying or shopping, or maladaptive buying or shopping impulses or behaviour, as indicated by at least one of the following:
 1. Frequent preoccupation with buying or impulses to buy that is/are experienced as irresistible, intrusive, and/or senseless.
 2. Frequent buying of more than what can be afforded, frequent buying of items that are not needed, or shopping for longer periods of time than needed.
- The buying preoccupations, impulses, or behaviours cause marked distress, are time-consuming, significantly interfere with social or occupational functioning, or result in financial problems (e.g., indebtedness or bankruptcy).
- The excessive buying or shopping behaviour does not occur exclusively during periods of hypomania or mania.

Compulsive buying is associated with significant psychiatric co-morbidity particularly mood and anxiety disorders, binge eating disorder, bulimia nervosa, obsessive–compulsive disorder, substance use disorders, and other impulse control disorders (e.g., Black, Repertinger, Gaffney, & Gabel, 1998; Christenson, Faber, de Zwaan, Raymond, Specker, Ekern, et al., 1994). There is no standard treatment approach for pathological buying, with only case studies and few controlled studies of medication (reviewed by Grant, Brewer, & Potenza, 2006; Grant & Potenza, 2004). One controlled pilot study of group psychotherapy has been published (Mitchell, Burgard, Faber, Crosby, & de Zwaan, 2006), and some case studies of psychotherapy have been reported (e.g., Bernik, Akerman, Amaral, & Braun, 1996; Krueger, 1988; Lawrence, 1990; Winestine, 1985).

Previous research has indicated that many compulsive buyers suffer from high levels of compulsive hoarding (Frost, Steketee, & Williams, 2002), and that there exists an association between compulsive hoarding and compulsive buying (Frost & Gross, 1993; Frost & Hartl, 1996; Frost et al., 1998). Frost and Hartl (1996, p. 341) defined hoarding as the “acquisition of, and failure to discard a large number of possessions that appear to be useless or of limited value; living spaces are sufficiently cluttered so as to preclude activities for which those spaces were designed; significant distress or impairment in functioning are caused by the hoarding”. Although previous research reported an association between compulsive hoarding and compulsive buying, to our knowledge no study has reported on the extent of compulsive hoarding among compulsive buyers. Though neither are separate diagnostic categories in DSM-IV, they have both been identified as serious and potentially debilitating conditions.

The present work examined the association of compulsive buying and compulsive hoarding specifically in a compulsive buying sample exploring the proportion of compulsive buyers with clinically relevant hoarding symptoms and focussing on the association between hoarding and the severity of compulsive buying, obsessive–compulsive traits, and psychiatric co-morbidity.

Subjects and methods

Participants

Inclusion criteria were current problems with compulsive buying according to the proposed diagnostic criteria for compulsive buying by McElroy et al. (1994). One hundred and ten (96 women, 14 men) respondents to newspaper advertisements and radio interviews inviting interested individuals to participate in a specific group therapy programme for compulsive buying at the University Hospital of Erlangen (Bavaria) were screened by phone. Ninety-seven persons (85 women, 12 men) met the diagnostic criteria, 68% of them (55 women and 11 men) gave informed consent and completed a questionnaire package. The mean age for the total sample was 41.2 years ($SD = 10.1$, range 19–61 years), and the mean duration of compulsive buying ranged between 1 and 43 years (mean 12.8, $SD = 10.4$).

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