

ICD® Clutter Quality of Life Scale (CQLS)

Background

Catherine Roster, Ph.D., from The University of New Mexico, worked with the Institute for Challenging Disorganization® to develop the ICD Clutter Quality of Life Scale (CQLS).

The Clutter Quality of Life Scale (CQLS) has been developed and is being tested by the Institute for Challenging Disorganization® (ICD®) as a self-assessment tool that measures an individual's felt, or subjective assessment, of the *consequences* of clutter on the person's quality of life across various life domains, including relationships with others, psychological distress, financial implications of clutter, and physical challenges or challenging living conditions created by clutter that impede life goals or the execution of daily tasks that contribute to negative consequences for one's well-being. The CQLS has been tested alongside numerous other scales that are similar in nature, including the Savings Inventory-Revised developed by Frost, Steketee, & Grisham (2004) and Diener et al.'s (1985) Satisfaction with Life Scale. The CQLS correlates appropriately with those scales.

Starting in 2010, work began on developing a tool that could be useful by professional organizers in their work with clients, and be a subjective measure of the consequences of clutter on a person's quality of life. Dr. Roster's background research regarding the concept of Quality of Life indicated that for true deep assessment of Quality of Life, both subjective (self-report) and objective (third-party) tools are necessary. The ICD® Clutter-Hoarding Scale is an objective tool. The CQLS is a subjective tool, designed not to diagnose hoarding disorder, but rather to assess the impact of clutter on well-being from the individual's perspective.

ICD volunteers provided feedback on negative consequences of clutter from their clients' perspective in the early stages of the development of the scale. These open-ended comments were then fashioned into early versions of the scale that were tested with a small sample of ICD clients. Subsequent testing with larger (n = 500) general population samples in the United States and a field test of the CQLS with a sample of 1300 from the United States and Canada, (only about 30 in Canada) has streamlined the CQLS from a scale of over 60 items to either 18 or 11 items. The 18-item scale includes more detail, including financial impact questions, making it perhaps more useful for professional organizers.

The CQLS can help organizers see where clutter is impacting the client's life, and how it may affect their motivation.

CQLS: A tool for professional organizers

Professional organizers may find the CQLS useful in a number of ways:

- During initial consultations, to gauge impact of clutter on client
- In conjunction with Clutter-Hoarding Scale to build a fuller picture of client situation
- Throughout organizing process as a measure of progress
- At end of organizing process, or during maintenance, to determine if further organizational steps need to be taken
- May be posted on websites as a resource (note: will need to check with ICD re: branding issues)

The ICD Clutter Quality of Life Scale

To what extent does clutter, defined as “an overabundance of possessions,” impact your current life and well-being?

Please read each statement below and indicate your extent of agreement to each statement.

Scale:

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. I’m concerned about what others might think of me if they knew about the clutter in my home.
2. **I have to move things in order to accomplish tasks in my home.**
3. I often buy things I already have because I don’t know where things are in my home.
4. The clutter in my home upsets me.
5. **I avoid having people come to my home because of the clutter.**
6. I try to avoid thinking about the clutter in my home.
7. **I don’t get to use spaces in my home the way I would like to because of clutter.**
8. **My family life has suffered as a result of the clutter in my home.**
9. **I feel overwhelmed by the clutter in my home.**
10. **I’m worried about the amount of clutter in my home.**
11. **I can’t find things when I need them because of clutter.**
12. I have incurred debt I can’t really afford as a result of having too many possessions.
13. **I feel guilty when I think about the clutter in my home.**
14. I have to be careful when walking through my home in order to avoid tripping over objects.
15. **I have neglected taking care of things that need to be done in my home because of the clutter.**
16. **I don’t have family members over as much as I would like because of the clutter in my home.**
17. I have been late paying bills more than once in the past 3 months because they got lost in the clutter.
18. **I feel depressed by the clutter in my home.**

Scale Description

The scale above should be scored as a summated scale with a range of 18 (low impact of clutter on subjective quality of life) to 126 (high impact of clutter on subjective quality of life). An average mean score of 59 with a standard deviation of 38 points was obtained in prior testing with mixed sample populations (e.g., those with clutter issues as well as those without). Repeated testing of the scale with 2 separate U.S. general population panel samples (n = 500) and with a sample obtained from posting the scale on ICD's webpage (n = 220) indicates a stable 1-factor structure that consistently explains 80% of variance in scores. The 18 items exhibit strong reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = .985), which indicates redundancy among items and opportunities to shorten the scale in the future.

In subsequent research, the 11 items in bold above perform just as well as the 18-item scale, and tap four dimensions of clutter impact on quality of life as follows:

Livability of Space

- I have to move things in order to accomplish tasks in my home. [CL2]
- I don't get to use spaces in my home the way I would like to because of clutter. [CL7]
- I can't find things when I need them because of clutter. [CL11]
- I have neglected taking care of things that need to be done in my home because of the clutter. [CL15]
- I have to be careful when walking through my home in order to avoid tripping over objects. [CL14]

Emotional

- The clutter in my home upsets me (CL4)
- I try to avoid thinking about the clutter in my home. (CL6)
- I feel overwhelmed by the clutter in my home. [CL9]
- I'm worried about the amount of clutter in my home. [CL10]
- I feel guilty when I think about the clutter in my home. [CL13]
- I feel depressed by the clutter in my home. [CL18]

Social

- I'm concerned about what others might think of me if they knew about the clutter in my home. (CL1)
- I avoid having people come to my home because of the clutter. [CL5]
- My family life has suffered as a result of the clutter in my home. [CL8]
- I don't have family members over as much as I would like because of the clutter in my home. [CL16]

Financial

- I often buy things I already have because I don't know where things are in my home. (CL3)
- I have incurred debt I can't really afford as a result of having too many possessions. (CL12)
- I have been late paying bills more than once in the past 3 months because they got lost in the clutter. (CL17)

The shortened 11-item scale is scored the same way by summing all the items. The range of the shortened scale is 11 (low impact of clutter) to 77 (high impact of clutter).

Purpose

The Clutter Quality of Life Scale (CQLS) is designed to measure inward, or subjective, consequences of clutter from the individual's perspective. As such, it provides an indirect assessment of a person's well-being by measuring personally felt negative consequences of clutter in that person's life across important life domains commonly associated with quality of life (QoL). The CQLS essentially measures personally felt impact of clutter on QoL across life domains, which can be quite different from 3rd party observation measures, such as ICD's Clutter-Hoarding Scale (C-HS). Both tools can contribute to a full understanding of the impact of clutter on a person's life.

Scale Development

The CQLS scale was developed by Dr. Catherine Roster, Associate Professor at Anderson School of Management, University of New Mexico[1], with help from volunteers[2] from the Institute for Challenging Disorganization (ICD). Dr. Roster is a consumer researcher with expertise in the area of possession dispossession and use of objects to fortify self-identity goals. The final set of items included in the CQLS are those that surfaced from the original pool of items as most statistically reliable and valid after multiple rounds of scale development surveys that included data obtained from over 1500 United States adult consumer panel members.

Scale Items

The CQLS scale contains 18 items, all fashioned as statements regarding clutter to which a person indicates their level of agreement with on a 7-point Likert scale in which 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree." Clutter is defined as "an overabundance of possessions." Life domains tapped include: 1) negative consequences of clutter with regards to relationships with others; 2) negative consequences of clutter with regards to personal finances; 3) negative consequences of clutter with regards to "livability" or functionality of one's home and spaces; and 4) negative consequences of clutter with regards to a person's overall feelings of anxiety, guilt, and depression.

Scoring

The scale should be scored as a summated scale with a range of 18 (low impact of clutter on subjective quality of life, SQoL) to 126 (high impact of clutter on subjective quality of life, SQoL). An average mean score of 59 with a standard deviation of 38 points was obtained in prior testing with mixed sample populations (e.g., those with clutter issues as well as those without). Categorically, scores can be interpreted as 18 to 53 = low impact of clutter on SQoL; 54 to 89 = average impact of clutter on SQoL; and a score of 90 or above = high impact of clutter on SQoL.