



KEY POINT SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of the study was to examine everyday clothing and textiles to identify holistic approaches to dementia care.

Aesthetics and dementia: exploring the role of everyday aesthetics in dementia care settings

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Key Concepts/Context

Research shows that dementia, an umbrella term for diseases that affect the brain, is characterized as a condition that causes problems with memory, cognition, and function with activities of daily living. In the United Kingdom, approximately 70% of the population identifying with a form of dementia are residing in a care home environment. Populations with dementia have been found to express certain preferences for types of aesthetics, such as sensory and routine-based experiences.

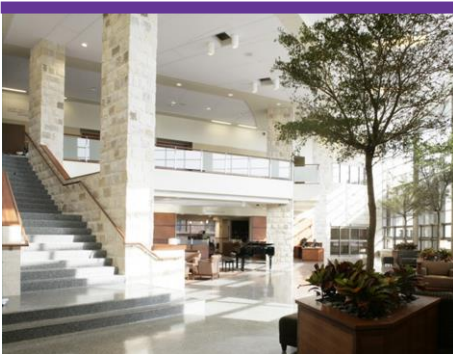
Methods

Influenced by Pink's Sensory Ethnography, the research included three interlinked cycles of study:

Cycle 1: Researchers explored how people with dementia and care home staff perceived different fabrics used in the clothes patients wore. Up to six encounters were carried out with each participant. Data collected during observations and interviews was analyzed using iterative, thematic analysis to inform the subsequent cycle.

Cycle 2: Creative practitioners who had experience with dementia patients and expertise in either visual arts, ceramics, theatre design, and/or music used Cycle 1 findings to develop thematic cards and tactile objects. The three themes resulting from the analysis of Cycle 2 data included 'playful,' 'narrative,' and 'dramatic'. These themes informed the design of objects, images, and materials for use in Cycle 3.

Cycle 3: Researchers conducted small group sessions where two to three people with dementia could handle objects developed during Cycle 2. The object-handling sessions are typically a routine psychosocial intervention offered in the care home, but were repurposed as a research-based data collection method for this study. There were three object-handling sessions per participant. Each session included different objects, images, and materials. Sessions were video-recorded and



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researchers conducted audio-visual analysis to explore verbal and non-verbal reactions and expressions.

Findings

A total of six care home staff, six creative practitioners, and 11 people with early-to-moderate stages of dementia participated in this study. The findings refer specifically to data collected from patient participants. All people with dementia were female, ranging in age from 79 to 90 years, and identified as White British, Egyptian, Turkish, and White American. Overarching themes from the three iterative cycles included:

Negotiating ‘aesthetic fit’ in the care home: This theme referred to participant choices regarding what to wear and how it fit with their sense of self and the fit with the aesthetics of the care home. Patterns indicated how clothing and accessory choices within the care home became aligned with the standardized institutional setting.

Taste: The look and feel: For people with dementia in this study, personal taste and preferences contributed to their responses to objects, materials, and interests. Participants commented on color selection, busyness of patterns, and cohesiveness of overall aesthetics with materials. Participants would express preferences or tastes when shown different materials even when not suitable for their use or wear.

Designing with textiles: Participants responded to various materials by describing the weight (*‘it’s a heavy pattern’*) or relating it to a pre-existing schema (*‘have it as a pleated skirt’*). Participants also commented on the volume of material, its design, and what the material may be suited for.

Interactions between caregivers and persons with dementia enabled connection and communication outside the traditional power differential seen within institutional care settings.

Limitations

This study was carried out at a single site, and due to the method used and small sample, wasn’t intended to be generalized. The research was subjective in nature and context-specific to this site and population. As such, the authors sought to report the methodology used and examine the interactions between caregivers and persons with dementia.



Design Implications

Consideration of textile-based aesthetics in dementia care settings may support enhanced stimulation and meaningful engagement not only with caregivers but also with their environment.

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