

“It’s an isolating experience to have people around you but not be able to communicate with them”: a qualitative study on the management of co-existing dementia and hearing loss in social care settings

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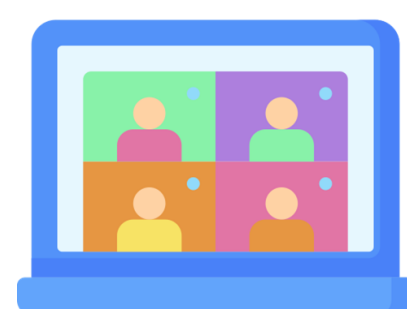
1. Background

- Dementia and hearing loss are highly prevalent and increase in prevalence and severity with age.
- In care homes, the vast majority of people live with one or the other condition, and many live with both.
- The presence of both conditions can mask each other, presenting challenges for both diagnosis, treatment and support; living with both conditions can increase care burden [1].

Research aim:

To qualitatively explore the experience, needs and opinions of how to manage hearing loss in people living with dementia in social care settings from multiple perspectives

2. Methods



6 focus groups with:

- People living with dementia and hearing loss (n=1)
- Informal carers (n=6)
- Social care professionals (n=7)

Thematic analysis:

1. Familiarisation
2. Generation of codes
3. Searching and grouping codes into themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Writing the narrative



3. Results

Demographics

- Mean age of social care professionals: 38 years (range 28-40); Mean age of informal carers/people living with dementia and hearing loss: 66 years (range 56-92); Female - Male: 11:3

THEME Subtheme	Illustrative examples
1. INCLUSION 1.1. Stigma 1.2. Isolation	1.2: “It is a very isolating experience to have people around you but not be able to engage with them or communicate with them properly.” SCP 6
2. COMMUNICATION 2.1. Impact on communication 2.2. Barriers to communication 2.3. Communication techniques	2.1: “I really don't know if that's to do with a behavioural issue with the dementia, or if it's to do with the hearing, or if it's a mixture of both, but it's difficult.” Informal carer 2 2.2: “When you're trying to talk to them and they've got the potato peeler going in the background, it causes behaviours because they can't hear you.” SCP 3
3. HEARING AIDS 3.1. Importance and value of hearing aids 3.2. Tolerance of hearing aids 3.3. Management and maintenance of hearing aids	3.2: “My experience has been that it's family that want the people to keep their hearing aids in and the actual clients themselves rarely wear them.” SCP 4 3.3: “They struggle just because they don't know how to change the batteries and how the tubing needs to be.” SCP 3
4. HEALTH SERVICES 4.1. Access to audiology services 4.2. Dementia pathways	4.1: “I think it's the hearing side of it that isn't there really... we have regular GP's, we have regular opticians, we even have the dentist quite a lot.” SCP 5 4.2: “We're at a later stage of their dementia journey, but like I said before, actually they just can't see, and they just can't hear very well and that is where the misdiagnoses are coming from.” SCP 5
5. TRAINING OF CARE STAFF	5: “The hearing side of things is something that we are trying to push, we don't have much on the hearing side at all apart from the basic how to put a hearing aid in and things like that. There's no element of actual how to communicate correctly with these people at the different stages of dementia.” SCP 5

4. Conclusion

- Hearing care for people living with dementia in social care settings should be tailored to the needs of individuals, taking into account the dynamic and progressive nature of both dementia and hearing loss
- Social care professionals require more support to help people living with dementia manage their hearing loss; training particularly in the management and maintenance of hearing aids would be valuable
- The role of audiology services in the care of individuals living in social care settings is not well understood and worthy of future investigation

References

[1] Broome E, Burgon C, Heffernan E, Denning T, Calvert S, Rajasingam S, et al. When Hearing Loss Co-occurs with Dementia: Challenges and Opportunities in Diagnosis and Management [Internet]. Updates on Hearing Loss and its Rehabilitation. IntechOpen; 2023. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.1003179>

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