



Clothing Selection Motivations and Challenges for Individuals with Alzheimer's Disease: A Qualitative Exploration of Caregivers' Viewpoints

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Introduction: According to the Alzheimer's Association (2018), the number of Americans living with Alzheimer's is continuously growing, and fast. An estimated 5.7 million Americans of all ages are living with Alzheimer's. Of this, an estimated 5.5 million people are aged 65 and older; this means that one in 10 people aged 54 and older has Alzheimer's (Alzheimer's Association, 2018). Further, there is an increasing population living with Alzheimer's at a younger age. This displays the importance of understanding the needs of individuals with Alzheimer's. Therefore, this study is designed to understand clothing selection motivations and dressing issues related to Alzheimer's disease. The purpose of this study is to investigate current adaptive clothing items that are available for individuals with Alzheimer's and explore their needs of effective clothing features from their caregiver's viewpoints.

Literature Review: Interest in studying personal traits and needs in relation to Alzheimer's has been increasing. For example, a study in UK raised issues with clothing for the individuals with dementia (Twigg, 2010). Several researchers have examined that clothing is importantly relevant to the well-being and care of people with Alzheimer's disease and dementia because clothing may have significant functions for the individuals (Twigg & Buse, 2013; Tahkavuori et al., 2011). The meaningful psychological effects of clothing on personal behavior includes increasing self-confidence by revamping their appearance (Johnson, Lennon, & Rudd, 2014). Although clothing is conceptualized as an agency of selfhood, clothing appears to be marginal in the lives of people with Alzheimer's. Loss of interest in appearance is one of the typical signs of dementia and Alzheimer's through insidious progress in the first instance. Clinical expertise reported that concern for appearance may rapidly deteriorate, later extending to poorly managed hygiene (Twigg, 2010). Caregivers often realize their relatives' changes in dressing or loss of interest. Thus, the following research questions have been raised for this study: 1) What are the challenges of dressing individuals with Alzheimer's disease?; 2) What are the important clothing features or factors for both individuals with Alzheimer's and their caregivers?

Method: This study employed qualitative one to one interviews of caregivers to understand clothing needs of individuals with Alzheimer's disease. The phenomenological experiences of caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's disease provided in-depth understanding of various clothing needs and meaning for these individuals. All 14 interviews were conducted with caregivers of the nursing homes in the Southwest area of the United States. A total of 14 caregivers (aged between 23 and 80) participated in the interviews. There were 13 females and 1 male. Each interview was audio recorded and lasted 20 to 60 minutes. For data identification, we used their pseudonym. Interview questionnaires pertained to the challenges of dressing and choices caregivers make for individuals with Alzheimer's disease: "As a caregiver, what types of

clothing choices would you make for this individual?”, “In your opinion as a caregiver, what do you see as the most important factor in selecting clothing for the individual with Alzheimer’s or dementia?” Interviews were transcribed verbatim. A thematic analysis was used to find the categories of experience shared by participants. The process began with the authors examining each transcript and then identifying the similarities and differences. For data analysis, Spiggle’s methodology of qualitative data interpretation (1992) was employed to identify distinctive themes. Until distinctive themes emerged, this identification process was repeated.

Results: A total of five themes emerged from the face to face interview with caregivers. These results were based on the phenomenological interpretation of interview data (van Manen, 1990). The themes were identified: *Comfortability*, *Past Self-Identity Reflected in Clothing*, *Dignity*, *Neatness*, and *Confusion*. All of the caregivers pointed out the importance of comfortability when they selected clothing for individuals with Alzheimer’s disease. *Comfortability* meant a loose fit for most of the caregivers (e.g., “I choose something that is comfortable because most of her clothes are a little bit tight on her, so I choose something that’s really loose”). The second theme, *Past Self-Identity Reflected in Clothing*, arose when caregivers talked about any preferences of clothing for individuals with Alzheimer’s disease. The patients look for clothing that they used to wear before and it reflected what jobs they had before (e.g., “I think she would care about the way that she would see professional as before”). *Dignity* was another interesting theme that emerged. Some caregivers mentioned that the clothing choice and how the patients look to others are related to dignity and self-expression (e.g., “It has to do with dignity. I mean if you relate it to yourself or to your parent or your grandparent, you wouldn’t want to come in and see them just wearing anything, you want them to look nice.”). Alongside dignity, participants highlighted the importance of *Neatness* when they dress up their patients (e.g., “No stains, no rips, no tears, or anything like that. I would say the way that it looks, cleanliness and neatness.”). Last but not least, *Confusion* explained that patients were confused and overwhelmed when they needed to make a decision. Thus, caregivers found that it is good to limit the options of selection for the patients they take care of (e.g., “Like today I went in there and she and I went and took a shower and then I had a few I picked out, two different options for her. Options overwhelm her. She gets confused.”)

Conclusion and Implications: Overall, we have identified certain important factors of adaptive clothing selection and challenges of dressing individuals with Alzheimer’s disease by exploratory qualitative interviews with their caregivers. Comfortability is the most important factor when they select clothing for the individuals with Alzheimer’s disease. Dignity and neatness are also important factors to show respectful care. Interestingly, the individuals’ past self-identity is reflected in their clothing choices. Confusion often limits their choices of clothing. Clothing might be a clue of the individual’s past self-identity. At the same time, adaptive clothing for comforting the individuals and their family is necessary. Future research should focus on developing adaptive clothing for individuals’ with Alzheimer’s disease with a better understanding of the disease and viewpoints from their family caregivers.

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