

UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David
London

Psychology in Health and Social Care

LCHS4010

Component 2: Written task – report

Student name: Luize Kludzina

Student ID: 2422963

Lecturer: Bianca Sanfilippo

Table of contents

Applying Psychological Theories to Support Older Adults with Dementia in a Care Home Setting

1. Introduction

Dementia is a loss of cognitive functioning; it affects brain and the whole cognitive function of a human. It interferes with a humans' ability to function, to the extent, that most people end up in the care homes, needing support. Their emotions change and, in such cases, there are

changes within a personality. Within the first stages of dementia, it starts to affect memories and in the last stage, the person is unable to take care of themselves, including, not being able to feed one's selves. (*National Institute of Aging; 2021*). Taking that into consideration, within the care home settings, carers must not only take care of psychological needs of the service users, but as well as emotional. To not only support them with basic care, but as well as emotionally, psychologically take care of their own needs. This report explores how people with dementia could be supported through Bowlby's attachment theory and Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory. Exploring these ideas, it can help to interpret behaviours and help in further care of these patients and support them.

2. Overview of Psychological Theories

Bowlby's Attachment Theory

John Bowlby's attachment theory (1969) focuses on early childhood bonds with their caretaker and how it translates into adulthood. Bowlby's attachment theory suggests that people are born with the urge to form attachment to their caregiver. When a secure attachment is formed, child has more confidence to explore their surroundings with their caregivers in a moment of distress. (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2015) and can create safe interpersonal relationships with others.

Although, Bowlby's attachment theory mainly focuses on children and their attachment patterns, different research psychologists have found out, these early bonds are important, especially with the mother, creates a pattern into adulthood, (Ainsworth, 1970). These early bonds show and set a foundation for future relationships and how they influence attachments for the rest of the life. (Cherry, K 2025).

With adults suffering from dementia, these attachment bonds become actual, since of the memory loss and feelingless of unfamiliarity can cause a lot of stress for the adult, but a safe attachment in childhood, can recreate a sense of ease, since it reminds them of their bonds with parents, since dementia brings back human brain back to their childhood. (Browne, C, J, 2007). Some dementia patients exhibit such behaviours, like, calling for their parents, crying to be put back in their childhood home, talking about their parents as if they are still alive. However, even though, there is a memory loss and difficulty recognising people who

are close to them, including their own family members, these patients still show a pattern of their attachment style.

Taking that into consideration, it is important to secure attachment with a patient suffering from dementia, to create a strong secure attachment, so in a moment of crisis, the person suffering from dementia could look for help.

The attachment theory helps to understand the basis of human psychology and how to help people experiencing dementia within a care home setting. Humans with dementia should have a key caretaker, a set routine and secure environment, to not provoke any kind of anxiety and the patient feels safe to explore the surroundings. Secure attachment with their caregiver (carer) is very important for the patient.

Applying Bowlby's Theory in Dementia Care Homes.

Bowlby's attachment theory provides a great foundation for care practices. People suffering from dementia in care homes, often experience a sense of loss, a separation from family and their surroundings. That could as well include repeated staff changes due to turnover. Understanding the emotions of a service user through an attachment theory, makes easier to make a way to ease their anxiety.

Consistency and routine

Consistency and a secure caregiver create a safe bond with their patient struggling with dementia. However, it is as well crucial for the caregiver to remember, the dementia patient is not only a patient but as well a human being. The staff in a care-home can create a safe environment, by simple acts, such as, sitting at an eye level, greeting by their name or explaining procedures, reminding of their hobbies, when they are having an episode. Supporting people as their cognitive decline happens, it is important to help them to stay connected to their peers and family. (Beattie, J West, J; 2021)

Practical examples.

Practical examples such as, a key carer, creates a person-centred care, taking into consideration of the patient likes and dislikes. In an episode of distress is important to take time to patiently explain and bring back them to reality, even it means explaining things repeatedly. Reminding of the small things that they used to like and enjoy.

Challenges.

Challenges usually arises when a staff member feels overly pressured by the intimate attachment which was created by the service user, since they are their primary care giver. It is important for the staff member to establish professional boundaries within themselves. Moreover, staff leaving, can again create a distrust and create anxiety and leaving them abandoned.

Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory

Lev Vygotsky’s social-cultural theory emphasises that cognitive development is developed through social interactions, within a cultural context. That term is named- scaffolding. Learning is achieved through language and shared activities. The Zone of Proximity (ZPD) a fundamentally new approach, that learning should be archived though a child’s level of development. What a child can do independently and in which areas they need guidance.

Whereas it is similar, as with Bowlby, Vygotsky's’ theories were based on children, however, his theory can be applied with people suffering from dementia as well. Taking that into perspective, within a dementia care that could be interpreted as, what a person can do

independently and what a person can do on their own. Moreover, understanding the dementia patients' limitations, and it is important to make realistic and make their life more meaningful and comfortable. (*Varako, N A; 2014*)

Identity and social interactions are important for older adults and carers play a role in creating an identity and a sense of belonging. Making sure they are understood and cared for.

Dementia as it progresses, erases previous knowledge and experiences, leaving the individual reliant on support. Through integrated play, music and art, within their daily lives, carers can help the patients to find a sense of normalcy in an unfamiliar environment. It as well created a sense of security for the families involved, knowing their family member is in an environment where they are supported and not are their needs taken care of, but they are as well involved in simple tasks, and their dignity is preserved.

Applying Vygotsky’s Theory in Dementia Care Homes

Vygotsky’s social-culture definition can transform care homes into supported communities, not a medical practice home, and create a meaning. Supporting people as their cognitive decline happens, it is important to help them to stay connected to their peers and family. (*Beattie, J West, J; 2021*)

Facilitating cultural aspects.

Care home staff, can bring out the patients cultural, familiar elements. Such as cooking their favourite food, recalling memories, playing familiar songs and recalling about their previous profession. These interactions help the patient within their ZPD- tasks which are archivable with the support within their proximity of their cognitive abilities.

Practical examples.

Staff can structure tasks, which involves a gentle scaffolding, the research done by Ramsey, A; Webb, S; Ellis, M (*2018*) patients who were involved in gentle scaffolding were able to construe a simple drawing - a teapot. Whereas patients who were left alone, they showed worse results by lea

ving a blank page. Study shows that people who were unsupervised couldn't pay attention, could not follow through. All drawings were presented and signed by the care home residents, making their work and life more meaningful. However, it is as well important to include them in daily tasks, of course, it depends on the severity of their illness, such as, watering their plants, folding their own laundry, wiping off dust.

Challenges

However, the main challenge stands, the more advanced is dementia, the less it is applicable to the patient and their situation. Advanced dementia proceeds a challenge of people completely losing their cognitive functions, so this theory is mainly applicable to those with the early onset or just the beginning of the illness. Moreover, not all staff is trained to a certain patient's cultural sensitivity, it can lead to difficulties to make patient comfortable.

Conclusion

In conclusion these both theories support and help dementia patients experiencing cognitive loss and ability to understand their own surroundings. Using these theories care homes can use to understand how to make the service user feel more comfortable and their experience more enjoyable. Bowlby's attachment theory teaches that early attachment is also applicable even in the adulthood, and the same principles goes with the dementia patients. Vygotsky's

socio-cultural theory shows that dementia patients strive from scaffolding, which supports and somewhat integrates dementia patients and help them in their daily lives.

References:

Beattie, J. and West, J. (2021). *Dementia: attachment matters*. [online] Iriss. Available at: https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/insights/dementia-attachment-matters

Browne, C.J. and Shlosberg, E. (2005). Attachment behaviours and parent fixation in people with dementia: The role of cognitive functioning and pre-morbid attachment style. *Aging & Mental Health*, 9(2), pp.153–161. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/13607860412331336760

Cherry, K. (2025). *What is attachment theory?* [online] Verywell Mind. Available at: https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-attachment-theory-2795337

Nadine Julia (2024). *Case Study: Delivering Exceptional Dementia Care at Home*. [online] feelcare. Available at: https://www.feelcare.co.uk/post/case-study-delivering-exceptional-dementia-care-at-home

National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health (UK) (2015). *Introduction to children's attachment*. [online] National Library of Medicine. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK356196/

National Institute on Aging (2022). *What Is Dementia? Symptoms, types, and Diagnosis*. [online] National Institute on Aging. Available at: https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/alzheimers-and-dementia/what-dementia-symptoms-types-and-diagnosis

Ramsey, A., Webb, S. and Ellis, M. (2018). *Scaffolding for artistic success: comparing structured and unstructured art activity for people with dementia*. [online] Available at: https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10023/17502/Ellis_2018_JDC_Scaffolding_AAM.pdf?sequence=1

Sarmiento-Campos, N.-V., Lázaro-Guillermo, J.C., Silvera-Alarcón, E.-N., Cuellar-Quispe, S., Huamán-Romaní, Y.-L., Apaza, O.A. and Sorkheh, A. (2022). A Look at Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT): The Effectiveness of Scaffolding Method on EFL Learners' Speaking Achievement. *Education Research International*, 2022, pp.1–12. doi:https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/3514892

Scott, S. and Palincsar, A. (n.d.). *Sociocultural Theory*. [online] Available at: http://www.dr-hatfield.com/theorists/resources/sociocultural_theory.pdf

Varako, N.A. (2014). *Constructing The Psychological Supports in an Elderly Patient with Cognitive Deficiency Based on Vygotsky- Luria System*. [online] https://publications.hse.ru/. Available at: https://publications.hse.ru/pubs/share/folder/0r0quas5l1/128219870.pdf