

# Understanding dementia and its relevance for the hospitality industry

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Using hospitality services can be a challenge for people with dementia. Dementia is “a progressive disorder where there is a decline in a variety of mental functions” [1, p. 1]. Forms of dementia, such as vascular dementia and Alzheimer’s, include symptoms such as memory loss, cognitive decline in speech, thinking, and understanding, disorientation, personality or mood changes, paranoia or hallucination, and reduced physical ability. Over 50 million people are currently living with dementia worldwide; a number forecast to double every 20 years (<https://alzheimers.org.nz/>). While dementia can add many challenges to an individual’s life, and that of their carers and/or companions, those affected should still be able to participate in hospitality experiences as part of their meaningful and active social lives, which are crucial to slowing the disease’s progression, especially in its early stages before more specialised care becomes essential.

Our study assessed the current research on dementia and hospitality, and the implications for the hospitality industry of catering to people with dementia. Specifically, the study had three aims: i) to reveal existing knowledge on dementia and hospitality/tourism; ii) identify current gaps in the knowledge; and iii) identify potential avenues for future consideration. A systematic literature review method was used [2]; the initial search found 1,362 sources of information. After applying filters to ensure only relevant peer-reviewed journal articles relating specifically to hospitality and/or tourism were included in the review, 16 eligible studies remained, which were then manually analysed using a content analysis [3]. The analysis surrendered information on a range of topics, including hospitality in healthcare accommodation, experiences of dining out, destination management and business perspectives, understanding the market, and carers’ experiences of travel. The studies selected for analysis were conducted largely in the United Kingdom, along with two from Taiwan, and others from the Netherlands, Canada, Russia, and the United States.

The analysis revealed important insights and implications for the hospitality industry, highlighting the importance for people with dementia to participate in social and leisure activities, in order to maintain their sense of normalcy, and derive meaning from their experiences [4]. Several barriers to participation in hospitality for people with dementia were revealed, such as access to facilities and amenities [5], ignorance and negative perceptions of dementia by staff [6], and the impact of a carer’s perception of the person

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with dementia's ability to participate in the activity [5]. For example, dining out was considered important for carers, who valued breaks from the busy and often demanding nature of caring for a person with dementia [6].

Only two of the 16 analysed articles related specifically to discussions of dementia and the hospitality industry, highlighting the importance of researching this area. The negative attitudes of hospitality staff towards those with dementia is argued to be a significant issue for the industry, and reported to arise from a lack of understanding of the needs and preferences of people with dementia, rather than from any deliberate intent to be unaccommodating [6]. As such, a key recommendation made by researchers is for hospitality providers to find ways to educate and train their staff on how they can provide positive experiences for customers with dementia. An understanding of dementia itself and how it can manifest, can be gleaned from local community support organisations.

There is also a need for future innovations, accommodations, and considerations of hospitality experiences and products to better cater to people with dementia. This may include modifications to hospitality environments to make them more accessible, such as through high contrast décor, safe payment options, or clear orientation and facilities layout. It may also include the development of specific products, such as memory cafés, dementia-friendly respite accommodation, or restaurants that cater to, or specifically raise awareness of dementia, such as the Restaurant of Mistaken Orders in Japan. Considering the global issue of population ageing, and the strong link between ageing and dementia, hospitality providers and scholars are recommended to begin the journey to understand how to better meet future demand, and importantly, improve the quality of life for customers with dementia, along with their carers and companions.

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