

The experience of attending a farm-based day care service from the perspective of people with dementia: A qualitative study

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Abstract

People with dementia have different needs, and it is important to have variation in the services that are offered for this population. Farm-based day care aims to meet this diversity in need, but research on such services is lacking. The present study provides knowledge about how people with dementia experience attending farm-based day care services in Norway. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted for five different services, while the participants were at the farm. The interviews were analysed in accordance with the content analysis of Graneheim, U., & Lundman, B. (2004) [*Nurse Education Today*, 24(2), 105–112] and revealed three main categories that included (1) social relations, (2) being occupied at the farm, and (3) individually tailored service. The findings were summarised in the overall theme that attending day care at a farm makes me feel like a real participant. Our findings indicate that the farm-based day cares in the present study provide person-centred care. The farm setting facilitates services that are tailored to the individual, where the participants get to use their remaining resources and spend time outdoors. Further, farm-based day care was described as being suitable for people with or without farm experience and must be seen as an important supplement to regular day care for those who could benefit from a more active service.

Keywords

dementia, qualitative interviews, day care, farm-based day care, care farms

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Background

As dementia progresses, people who are affected will need assistance from others. They can no longer remain at their ordinary workplace or be able to perform all of the activities that they used to do (Engedal & Haugen, 2018; Hvidsten et al., 2018). Many people with dementia withdraw from social situations or feel disconnected from their relationships (De Bruin et al., 2016; Eriksen et al., 2016). Day care services aim to create space for social interactions, provide meaningful activities in a safe environment and improve the quality of life of people with dementia (Fields et al., 2014; Norwegian Ministry of Health and Care Services, 2015). The qualitative research in this area finds that regular day care services (mostly taking place in nursing homes) fulfil these goals and provide structure and routine in life (Stephan et al., 2018; Strandenaes et al., 2017). However, some people with dementia feel too young or too healthy to attend regular day care programmes (Kerpershoek et al., 2019).

To meet the different needs of people with dementia, it is important to have variation in the day care services that are offered. Farm-based day care service (FDC) is a type of service that differs from regular day care by using activities and resources in the environment at a farm to promote mental and physical health (Hemingway et al., 2016; Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 2013). In Norway, these kinds of services are small-scale facilities with home-like environments. They are located on farms that are usually agriculturally productive (Ibsen et al., 2018). Each municipality is financially responsible for providing day care to their inhabitants. Thus, FDC is a social partnership between the municipality and the service providers, and also the participants who most often pay a small share for attending the service (Gjøra et al., 2015). This in line with the Nordic model, including Denmark, Sweden Finland and Norway, where there are established social policy arrangements that take care of welfare services to the population (Kautto et al., 1999).

Studies from the the Netherlands and Norway have found that FDC offers a wide range of farm activities and use the outdoor environment for walking and nature experiences (De Bruin et al., 2016; Ibsen et al., 2018). In a systematic review, Førsvund et al. (2018) found that outdoor activities were a central way for people with dementia to experience meaning, and those outdoor environments were also an essential source of sustaining their identity. Other studies emphasised that being outdoors and in nature, regardless of activity performed, has a positive influence on the quality of life (Ibsen et al., 2020; Orr et al., 2016). A systematic review including both quantitative and qualitative studies, stated that participating in physical activity and spending time outdoors had a positive influence on one's mood and well-being and the ability of people with dementia to maintain their sense of self (Junge et al., 2018).

FDCs are found to be a suitable environment for person-centred care because of the small-scale service and the ability for more individualised activities (De Bruin et al., 2016; Ibsen et al., 2018). However, research on the participant's perspective about attending an FDC is limited. To our knowledge, there are only a few qualitative studies that have been conducted where the voices of people with dementia are present: two in Norway (Myren et al., 2017; Sudmann & Børsheim, 2017) and one in the the Netherlands (De Bruin et al., 2015). Findings from these studies revealed that the participants at FDCs were content with being part of the activities at the farm, and that they felt useful (De Bruin et al., 2015; Myren et al., 2017; Sudmann & Børsheim, 2017). Further, a study that focused on different client groups, including people with dementia, found that animals may provide different aspects of care needs for the participants at care farms (Hassink et al., 2017).

More research needs to be done to expand knowledge about the participants' perspective of the service offered at farms. People with dementia can express their experiences and wishes, and it is

important to explore these (Bowling et al., 2015). In the present study, we aim to investigate how people with dementia describe attending FDCs in Norway.

Methods

Design

The study has a qualitative and descriptive design. We used individual interviews to gather data. The interviews were dialogical and guided by a semi-structured interview guide (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The questions attempted to gather information about the experience of attending an FDC and to gain knowledge about the interactions the participants had and the activities they participated in at the farm (Figure 1).

All the interviews were done by the first author. In line with Polit and Beck (2017), the first author was interviewed by the second author prior to the study, to create a conscious relationship with own pre-understanding. Due to a positive attitude towards FDCs, it was perceived as important to also search for the critical aspect of FDCs during the interviews. Thus, all the participants were asked if there was something they did not like at the FDC or if something should be different.

Sample and recruitment procedure

We recruited 10 people diagnosed with dementia who attended FDCs in different parts of Norway. The participants were recruited from five different farms for a purposeful sample through their providers. The characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

The inclusion criteria were that the participant had stayed at the farm for at least one month and could, to some extent, express themselves.

Theme	Opening question
Experience of attending farm-based day care.	Can you tell me what it is like to attend farm-based day care? What do you do during a normal day at the farm? Do you have experiences from being at a farm? How are the days at the farm compared to the days you are at home? Is it something you do not like at the farm, or that you think should be different?
Interactions with the others	How are your relationships with the other participants? How are your relationships with the providers? Do you have any interactions with the animals? Tell me more!

Figure 1. Main themes and examples of the opening questions from the interview guide.

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants and interview setting.

Name ^a	Sex	Age group	Living situation	Months at the FDC	Number of days at the FDC per week	Previous experience with farm work	Interview setting
Paul	M	60–70	With partner	16	4	Yes	Working with wood
John	M	71–80	Alone	24	3	Yes	Raking grass
Thomas	M	81–90	With partner	76	2	No	Indoors
Greta	F	81–90	Alone	14	2	No	The hen yard
Ruth	F	60–70	With partner	3	2	No	Walking in the woods
Peter	M	60–70	With partner	14	3	No	Sitting outdoors
Karen	F	60–70	With partner	14	3	No	Sitting outdoors
Elsa	F	81–90	Alone	8	1	Yes	Indoors
William	M	70–80	With partner	16	2	Yes	Indoors
David	M	60–70	With partner	3	2	No	Indoors/Outdoors

Note: FDC: farm-based day care service.

^aFictional names.

Data collection

The interviews were conducted between May and November 2018. All of the interviews took place at the farm, so the participants could better remember or relate to the day care setting (Digby et al., 2016). Even though the participants had consented to participate in an interview before the interviewer came to the farm, they were all asked again to confirm that they wanted to participate. On one occasion, a woman declined to participate when asked at this point, and the interview was cancelled. In agreement with the providers, the interviewer had breakfast with the participants prior to the interviews. The intention by this was to establish a safe setting for the participants since the interviewer was an unknown person. In addition, the conversations and observations that occurred during the morning were useful, as the interviewer was able to raise different topics during the actual interview. For example ‘I saw before breakfast that [another participant] was holding his arm around you when you sat on the couch (...)’. The researcher planned to conduct all of the interviews during a farm activity or while walking, but some interviews had to be done inside due to the weather or the participant’s wishes. The interviews lasted from 25 to 41 minutes. They were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the interviewer.

Ethical considerations

All of the participants had the capacity to give consent, according to the judgement of the providers. They were informed about the purpose of the study and asked to give their written consent before the interview. The researcher informed the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time before, during and after the interview. Both the interviewer and the provider at the farm worked to make the interview situation safe by being together before the interview and choosing a facilitated activity to perform during the talk.

Interviewing people with dementia can be challenging and contains many different ethical considerations. Some people with dementia have difficulty finding words and some lose track of the conversation due to their memory loss. These difficulties require the interviewer to be able to keep

the conversation going at the pace of the person with dementia and to act respectfully when participants need to be directed back to the topic (Digby et al., 2016; Hellström 2007).

The study was approved by The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (No. 49,799).

Analysis

The analysis was conducted according to the content analysis of Graneheim and Lundman (2004) and consisted of different levels of abstraction. The material in the present study was analysed on both the manifest and latent level, starting with the manifest level, which presented what was expressed in the text, and continued with interpreting the latent level, which discussed what the text talked about (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The analysis was conducted by the first author (TLI) in close cooperation with the second author (SE). The process consisted of six steps. In the *first step*, all of the transcribed interviews were read thoroughly, and meaning units were drawn from the interviews as direct citations. *Second*, the meaning units were condensed but were still kept close to the text. In the *third step*, the condensed meaning units were extracted and labelled with codes. In the *fourth step*, the codes were compared based on similarities and differences and grouped into subcategories, and similarly, categories were found in the *fifth step*. Finally, in the *sixth step*, the categories were reflected up on and interpreted at the latent level, and the underlying meaning of the text was presented as an overall theme. An example of the analytical process is shown in Table 2.

Results

The participants were men and women, some with and some without previous experience with farm work (Table 1). There were no differences found between how those with and without farm experience described having day care at a farm. The structure of the day was similar at the five participating farms and included breakfast, work session, coffee break, walk or other activities and then dinner before leaving. The material revealed three main categories: (1) social relations, (2) being occupied at the farm and (3) individually tailored service. The categories were divided into subcategories (Table 3).

Social relations

The interviews revealed that the dementia diagnosis had changed the participants' possibilities and ways to be together with family and others. This was described as exhausting because they still wanted to be in relationships similar to before:

I do not experience it as strongly as those around me do. That is the horrible thing about it, really. I think it is exhausting because I feel that I am pretty much on track, all the time, actually. It is the ones around me that experience that I am demented. That I can behave strangely or say something weird. I do not feel that in the same way. (Paul)

Both those who lived together with a partner and those who lived alone spoke of their days at home as being more silent and with far less things going on than their days at the farm. The service at the farm gave the participants a reason to get out of the house and something to look forward to in their everyday life. The meals, in particular, were mentioned as nice for social interactions because they were an opportunity to gather together as a group. The category *social relations* contain the subcategory *being part of a fellowship*.

Table 2. Example of analysis.

Meaning unit	Condensed meaning unit	Codes	Subcategory	Category
Attending day care at a farm makes me feel like a real participant				
<i>I will say it is good to be here. I know that some may be extra forgetful and are more chaotic than others, but then the others take care of them. Thus, we are a nice, close group. No one gets bullied, or something like that. We take care of each other. We are in the same situation, really (...) So, we have everything to gain by being together. (Peter)</i>	It is good here. Some are more forgetful. Others take care of them. We are a nice close group. We are in the same situation. We have everything to gain by being together.	Close relations at the farm. Take care of each other. Have all to gain by being together.	Being part of a fellowship	Social relations
<i>I feel that I am a part of a fellowship. That is how it is. If not, we did not need to be here. We, all of us here, get paid by the state [pension]. (John)</i>	Being a part of a fellowship. Don't need to work at the farm. Are paid by pension.	Being part of a fellowship. Come voluntarily		
<i>Although we are different, we have something in common. We are the same. And we have good conversations and laughs... yes, we laugh a lot (Ruth)</i>	Are different but have something in common. Good conversations and laugh a lot	Have something in common. Good conversations. Laugh a lot.		
<i>I must work to feel well, and what you are doing must feel quite sensible. I don't know if staking wood is sensible, but in my age, I think it is fine. (Anders)</i>	Must work to feel well and it must feel sensible. Staking wood is fine in my age.	Work to feel well. Must feel sensible to me	Feels like working	Being occupied at the farm
<i>Like it is here now, I think we do what is possible at a farm. Vi cut the grass, do woodwork, we clean the area, we walk in the woods. (Peter)</i>	We do what is possible at a farm	Being able to take part in different farm works		
<i>(...) we must not forget the sheep. When that is done, someone goes to cut the grass, and when that is done... yes, it is about four-five people working with different tasks. (John)</i>	We must feed the sheep, then there is different farm work to do. About four-five people work with different tas2ks.	Feeding the sheep. There is different farm work to several participants.		

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Attending day care at a farm makes me feel like a real participant		Codes	Subcategory	Category
Meaning unit	Condensed meaning unit	Codes	Subcategory	Category
<i>I want something to do during the day, and this is very specific. It is hardly physically demanding. Or, it is a bit physically demanding, but that is no big deal. (Anders)</i>	Want something to do during the day. This is specific and a bit physically demanding.	Something specific to do Physical demanding.	Being active	
<i>We often walk in the surroundings. We always do that when we are here. All the time. (Greta)</i>	We always walk in the surroundings.	Walks everyday.		
<i>Sometimes we go for an excursion. They [the providers] are good. We do different things. Not the same every day. Trips... I don't remember the names of the trips, I just walk along with them (laugh). Walking there... and then it is another trial (pointing in another direction), and then down there again, there are trials there too. (Peter)</i>	We go for excursions. We are not doing the same trips every day.	Go for excursions. Variety in walking trips.		
<i>We are often walking outdoors in the wintertime too. Often one and a half to two hours. We can drive places too. Then we have been in the mountain, looked out on the water. That is very nice. They match the season activities to what we are capable of. (Karen)</i>	We are outside summer and winter, up to two hours. We can drive to the mountain and look out on the water. It is very nice. They match the activities to what we are capable of.	Being outdoors summer and winter, give nice nature experiences.	Being outdoors	
<i>All services for people with dementia are good, I guess. But it is special here at the farm, where we can be outdoors. That is probably possible in other settings too, but having groups for conversations... Here the conversations appear naturally. (Ruth)</i>	At the farm we can go outdoors. The conversations appear naturally.	Going outdoors. Conversations appear naturally.		
<i>Some of them have a kind of a dark voice. (Greta)</i>	Some sheep have a dark voice	The sensory experience of having sheep in the surroundings.		

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Meaning unit	Condensed meaning unit	Codes	Subcategory	Category
Attending day care at a farm makes me feel like a real participant				
It is mostly the providers that according to their knowledge delegate the... Now, you can take the sheep-job, and other things. They pick the work for us. They probably see... They see... (John)	The providers delegate the work according to their knowledge of us.	The work is facilitated for the participant's skills.	Being seen for who I am	Individually tailored service
It would be demanding if you had to 'share your feelings', somehow. I am good at not doing that. That is why this suits me very well (pointing at the woodwork). Ok, to work alone. (...) I do not think I am very social, really. I am not. (Paul)	No one require that I must share my feelings. It suits me that they let me work with wood alone.	The persons autonomy/ personal needs are respected and taken in to account		
Previously, there was someone here that was rude, I am a cautious person. I actually woke up crying. So, I told the provider. She said it should not be like that, so she [the other person] was moved. (...) She is still at the farm, but in a different group. (Karen)	I had to tell the provider that I was hurt by someone being rude. I cried at night. The provider moved the other person to a different group.	The person's feelings were listened to and respected.		
H: (...). Because there is a lot of work, they want us to do. That we shall do this and that. It may be a little too much from time to time. I: But if so (...) Can you tell them? H: I suppose I can. I: What would happen? H: We talk together and find out what to be done. (William)	Sometimes the provider expects us to do too much work. Then we can talk together and agree on what to be done.	The participants can influence on the work that shall be done.	Being one who contribute	

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Attending day care at a farm makes me feel like a real participant			
Meaning unit	Condensed meaning unit	Codes	Subcategory Category
<p><i>I have been in the barn, and when the animals are done with their business, I clean the floor. (...) Yes, and I have been outside, to bring the animals in. I have taken part in... The joy of it has been the trust I have been given by the providers (tears in his eyes). I am a city boy! (Thomas)</i></p> <p><i>There are some they don't trust to use tools. I have been a carpenter and are used to axes and all sorts of tools, and down there, there is a log-splitter. It is almost just me that are trusted to use it. Otherwise (he waves his arms), someone could lose an arm. (Peter)</i></p>	<p>I clean the floor in the barn, and I bring in the animals. There is a joy to be given this trust by the providers. I am a city boy.</p>	<p>Being trusted to take part in farm work that needs to be done, though it is unfamiliar.</p> <p>Let the participants use their competence. Feeling needed at the farm.</p>	

Table 3. Categories and subcategories from the analysis.

Category	Social relations	Being occupied at the farm	Individually tailored service
Subcategory	Being part of a fellowship	Feels like working Being active Being outdoors	Being seen for who I am Being one who contributes

Being part of a fellowship. This category involves several elements describing fellowship at the farm. The social relationships that occurred were threefold and included relationships to other participants, to the providers and to the animals. The majority of the participants described developing close relationships with the others at the farm, and their ability to have a special fellowship due to their similar situation of having dementia:

I will say it is good to be here. I know that some may be extra forgetful and are more chaotic than others, but then the others take care of them. Thus, we are a nice, close group. No one gets bullied, or something like that. We take care of each other. We are in the same situation, really (...) So, we have everything to gain by being together. (Peter)

I feel that I am a part of a fellowship. That is how it is. If not, we did not need to be here. We, all of us here, get paid by the state [pension]. (John)

Being together with others in the same situation helped the participants use humour as a strategy for coping with their dementia diagnosis:

Although we are different, we have something in common. We are the same. And we have good conversations and laughs... yes, we laugh a lot. That is so liberating! (Ruth)

Some participants mentioned challenging situations that occurred in this group of people who have different personalities and are in different stages of dementia:

It can be a little difficult between us sometimes, how some speak to each other. Overall, I do think we manage to cooperate as good as possible. (John)

Ruth was considerably younger than the others in the group. She stated that the age difference did not seem to be an issue, as the relationships between the participants were described as more important than their age:

I think that in this setting, so... I really do not think it [age] is important, as long as they are nice people. (...) There are many retirees that are even more vigorous than me, to put it that way. Or at least just as vigorous, so... (Ruth)

At some farms, the participants showed a closeness to each other exhibited by holding each other's arms while walking or sitting together:

G: He likes to hold his arm around me when we sit down.

I: Do you like it too?

G: Yes, of course! (Greta)

The interviews revealed that the providers played an important role in the well-being of the participants and their feeling of being taken good care of:

I think this is a good place to be, and it is mostly thanks to [name of the providers] who are who they are. (...) So that is probably the most important thing. It is someone I know I am confident with. (Ruth)

Some described their relationship to both the other participants and the providers as that of colleagues because they were all working at the farm:

We have a good relationship. But it is not a close relationship. It is nothing but a nice relationship. Colleagues, together. (Paul)

While the majority included the providers as an equal part of the group, others described a distinction between the participants and the providers. Those with the latter view were over-represented in the group who saw themselves as someone working at the farm:

I: Do you feel that fellowship with the providers too?

J: No, I can't say that, can I? They live here on the farm, you know (...) We [the participants] are taken home where we live. (John)

In addition, the participants described a fellowship with the animals at the farm:

(...) I like the sheep. They are down there, and we bring them bread and water and ... then we feed the sheep. And the ...the others, the rabbits, they are right over there. In a sort of box. There are two of them. (John)

David, who had some language difficulties, said that '*it is nice to play with them*' [pointing at the goats]. After the interview, he showed how he fed and played with the goats.

Finally, some participants spoke of how the fellowship at the farm had an influence on the relationships with their partners at home. The farm-based day care represented a normal life that included going to work and meeting colleagues, similar to the lives of some of the participants' partners. Additionally, meeting others at the farm could ease the need for social interaction with the partners:

We can talk to each other [at the farm]. I think that is a plus. At home it is a bit limited. We do not talk all the time. When I have been here, I do not have that need. (Karen)

Being occupied at the farm

The FDC was described as a place where the participants were occupied in different ways with activities that provided meaning and a feeling of usefulness. They emphasised that the farm context

formed the basis for the service offered. The interviews revealed the subcategories: *feels like working, being active and being outdoors*.

Feels like working. Many of the participants talked about the farm as a place of work. Whether they were feeding the animals, staking wood or planting vegetables, the activity was described as meaningful. The work tasks were things that needed to be done at a farm and, therefore, were experienced as ‘real work’:

I must work to feel well, and what you are doing must feel quite sensible. I don't know if staking wood is sensible, but at my age, I think it is fine. (Paul)

The farm environment offers a great variety of work that needs to be done during a day or a season:

(...) I think we do what is possible at a farm. We cut the grass, do woodwork, we clean the area, we walk in the woods. (Peter)

(...) we must not forget the sheep. When that is done, someone goes to cut the grass, and when that is done...yes, it is about four-five people working with different tasks. (John)

In addition, the participants emphasised that they wanted to work to be useful and help the providers when they were at the farm:

I have offered to help with the jobs the providers think I am capable of.

(...) Hopefully I do a good job for the providers. (Thomas)

It is very good to participate in such things and be able to do something back for what we get. Even though we pay for it, it is important to take part in what's to be done, to the possible extent. (Ruth)

Being active. The participants described a great variety of activities in which they took part. Many of these activities were related to work as described above, but it was also emphasised that they were physically active while working:

I want something to do during the day, and this is very specific. It is hardly physically demanding. Or, it is a bit physically demanding, but that is no big deal. (Paul)

The most common activity that was not work related was going for walks, and the participants mentioned that the farm surroundings had many walking opportunities:

We often walk in the surroundings. We always do that when we are here. All the time. (Greta)

Sometimes we go for an excursion (...) We do different things. Not the same every day. Trips..., I don't remember the names of the trips, I just walk along with them (laugh). Walking there..., and then it is another trail (pointing in another direction), and then down there again, there are trails there too. (Peter)

The participants also performed indoor activities, such as reading newspapers or preparing dinner. The indoor activity participated in most often was having a meal, although meals could also take

place outdoors. The meals played an important role for many of the participants, both as an activity and as a reward for the work performed.

Being outdoors. The participants said that most of the activities at the farm took place outdoors. Being outdoors in the farm environment seemed to add to their experience. All of the farms were rural, even if they were situated close to urban areas. The natural surroundings were often mentioned in relation to all of the opportunities for activity or just because the participants found the scenery beautiful:

We are often walking outdoors in the wintertime too. Often one and a half to two hours. We can drive places too. Then, we have been in the mountains, looked out on the water. That is very nice. They [the providers] match the season activities to what we are capable of. (Karen)

One participant emphasised how being outdoors facilitated natural conversations:

All services for people with dementia are good, I guess. But it is special here at the farm, where we can be outdoors. That is probably possible in other settings too, but having groups for conversations... Here, the conversations appear naturally. (Ruth)

As mentioned earlier, some participants felt attached to the animals at the farm. Others described the animals as more like a part of the outdoor scenery. During one of the interviews conducted outdoors, we could see sheep around us. The participant said that she was not involved with the sheep during the day, but it was obvious that she paid attention to them when she said, ‘*some of them have a kind of a dark voice*’. (Greta)

Individually tailored service

The FDC was described as predictable because the participants had regular routines and structure. The transportation back and forth to the day care setting was expressed as something that gave them a feeling of individual facilitation because the dementia diagnosis prevented them from driving on their own. Furthermore, the participants described experiences or situations during the day that revealed that the providers sought to offer an individually tailored service. The present category consists of the subcategories; *being seen for who I am* and *being one who contributes*.

Being seen for who I am. The participants described a care environment where the providers facilitated work tasks in accordance with their individual abilities. This revealed a feeling of being seen by the provider as someone who had skills that were useful and even needed:

It is mostly the providers that according to their knowledge delegate the... Now, you can take the sheep-job, and other things. They pick the work for us. They probably see...They see... (John)

Some stories revealed how the staff at the farm took the participant’s personal needs and feelings into account when assigning tasks for their well-being at the farm. The participants expressed that their personality was respected and taken seriously:

It would be demanding if you had to ‘share your feelings’. I am good at not doing that. That is why this suits me very well (pointing at the woodwork). Ok, to work alone. (...) I do not think I am very social, really. I am not. (Paul)

Previously, there was someone here that was rude, I am a cautious person. I actually woke up crying. So, I told the provider. She said it should not be like that, so she [the other person] was moved. (...) She is still at the farm, but in a different group. (Karen)

Being one who contributes. The providers set the agenda for the day. Several participants reported that they had an influence on the activities and that they, to some extent, could choose between different tasks. However, all of the participants were expected to take part in the activities that were arranged:

H: (...). Because there is a lot of work, they want us to do. That we shall do this and that. It may be a little too much from time to time.

I: But if so (...) Can you tell them?

H: I suppose I can.

I: What would happen?

H: We talk together and find out what to be done. (William)

The expectation of everyone to participate in farm the activities was also an opportunity for the participants to do things that might be new and challenging. Some of the participants described their gratitude to the providers for the confidence they had gained by being allowed to do unfamiliar work tasks:

I have been in the barn, and when the animals are done with their business, I clean the floor. (...) Yes, and I have been outside, to bring the animals in. I have taken part in... The joy of it has been the trust I have been given by the providers (tears in his eyes). I am a city boy! (Thomas)

The work at the farm contributed to the participants' feeling of mastery and self-esteem since the participants were able to handle the delegated work. Peter described how his skills were needed because he was the only one with knowledge about using tools:

There are some they don't trust to use tools. I have been a carpenter and am used to axes and all sorts of tools, and down there, there is a log-splitter. It is almost just me that is trusted to use it. Otherwise, (he waves his arms), someone could lose an arm. (Peter)

Attending day care at a farm makes me feel like a real participant. In all of the categories presented above, people with dementia described how they played an active part in the relationships with others and in the work and help they provided at the farm. The farm context was described as a natural setting for outdoor activities, and the work tasks were characterised as authentic farm work that needed to be done. The participants were allowed to use their competency at different tasks at the farm, and they had the opportunity to have an influence on their stay at the day care. Therefore, the main categories could be summed up with the overall theme of 'attending day care at a farm makes me feel like a real participant'.

Discussion

The present study aimed to describe how people with dementia experience attending an FDC in Norway. All of the participants in our study described the FDC in positive terms, and they enjoyed being at the farm. In contrast to our expectations and earlier findings (Myren et al., 2017), we found that several participants did not have any previous experience with country life or farms. Our findings state that an FDC could be a positive experience for different people with dementia and that one should not exclude potential participants based on whether or not they have previous experience with farm activities.

Though the critical aspects of FDC also were searched for during the interviews, this was not revealed. Possible explanations are that the participants could be afraid that critical information would lead to negative consequences for their situation, though it was underscored that no such thing would happen. It could also be that they did not want to appear as one who complains, and that critical remarks would feel as being disloyal to their friends and providers at the farm. In addition, it may be that they were influenced by having a nice experience during the interview. Due to cognitive impairment, the feelings here and now are more prominent and may have coloured the participants' experience of being at a farm. However, our positive results are in line with earlier research (De Bruin et al., 2015; Myren et al., 2017; Sudmann & Børsheim, 2017).

Our findings provide knowledge about the participants' views of the service offered. The experiences described by the participants are summarised by the overall theme that attending day care at a farm makes me feel like a real participant. When analysing our material, we became aware of the connection between our findings and Aron Antonovsky's theory of 'salutogenesis'. Therefore, elements of this theory were included when discussing our findings (Antonovsky, 1993). 'Salutogenesis' focuses on what promotes (good) health and provides a sense of coherence in a person's life by referring to three core components: meaningfulness, comprehensibility and manageability (Antonovsky, 1993; Eriksson & Lindström, 2006).

Our participants emphasised relationships as one of the most important aspects of being at the day care. This complements earlier research conducted on regular day care (Strandenæs et al., 2017). People with dementia find it meaningful to be together with others in the same situation, where they feel that they belong and find acceptance (Eriksen et al., 2016; Strandenæs et al., 2017; Söderhamn et al., 2014). This finding supports the goals of day care in general, as described in policy documents (Fields et al., 2014; Norwegian Ministry of Health and Care Services, 2015). Being together with peers made the participants in the present study feel free to be themselves. They were not afraid of saying or doing silly things, and they could laugh together. Using humour to handle the challenges of dementia is a known coping strategy (Bjørkløf et al., 2019). However, it appeared that the humorous communication between them played a different role in this situation than using humour to deal with demanding situations in social interactions with others.

It has been claimed that people with dementia in regular day care are passive participants in the service that is provided (Strandenæs et al., 2017). In contrast, many participants in the present study defined themselves as playing a role in the activities and having something expected of them at the farm. They emphasised that they liked to work and that they wanted to contribute at the farm because it gave them meaning in life. This finding is in accordance with occupational science, which says that people create meaning in life through engaging in an occupation and through doing (Christiansen & Townsend, 2011). Antonovsky emphasises meaningfulness as a core component in a person's life because meaning is closely connected to feelings and motivation. To participate in activities that are experienced as meaningful provides a sense of coherence in life. It is not about what gives a person meaning in general but that this particular activity gives meaning to the specific person (Antonovsky,

1993; Eriksson & Lindström, 2006). Paul, one of our participants, put this sentiment into words: ‘*I must work to feel well, and what you are doing must feel quite sensible. I don’t know if staking wood is sensible, but at my age, I think it is fine*’. This quote also describes comprehensibility, which means that something is understandable and structured (Antonovsky, 1993; Eriksson & Lindström, 2006). In this context, the structure is the repeated farm activities that become familiar and the way that the days are planned at the FDC.

Among the farm-based activities described by our participants, physical activity was highlighted as being a positive activity. This supports earlier studies that have demonstrated the importance of physical activity for well-being and maintenance of identity (Førsund et al., 2018; Junge et al., 2018). In the present study, the participants stated that most of the physical activities took place outdoors. These activities were appreciated from both the health perspective and the joy of being in nature. Our findings are consistent with earlier research that states that being in nature gives a feeling of pleasure, relaxation, freedom and fitness (Hendriks et al., 2016; Orr et al., 2016). Some of the interviews revealed that the farm animals were an important part of the service provided at the FDC. This relationship has also been described by Hassink et al. (2017). Some participants talked about the animals as more of a scenery element, but they were still a sensory experience, such as something in their consciousness, while at the farm (Orr et al., 2016). This could be understood as the participants having the freedom to choose if they wanted to engage with the animals or not. Therefore, it may be possible to attend an FDC even if being with animals is not a particular interest of the participant.

The interviews provided insight into how the providers made use of the farm environment to facilitate the participant’s needs to experience mastery and autonomy. This confirms earlier research about FDCs (De Bruin et al., 2016; Ibsen et al., 2018). Such individual facilitation strengthens people’s experience of empowerment and is in line with person-centred care (Brooker, 2012). Empowerment refers to the power and resources that the person with dementia has to influence their own life (McConnell et al., 2019) and is closely related to Antonovsky’s third component, manageability. Manageability is described as the ability to have an impact on our own situation and environment (Eriksson & Lindström, 2006). People with dementia often describe that this ability is weakened and even ignored by others (Heggstad et al., 2013; Petty et al., 2018). Person-centred care highlights autonomy within dementia care (Brooker, 2012), and FDCs seem to have extended opportunities to promote autonomy. The individual facilitation may explain why the younger participant did not find the difference in age to be a problem, which is contrary to earlier research at regular day cares (Kerpershoek et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the facilitation of individuality at the farm contributed to make the participants experience meaningfulness, comprehensibility and manageability, which led to the feeling of being a real participant at the day care. This aligns with theory of Axel Honneth, who claims that people achieve autonomy and constitute their identity through a ‘struggle for recognition’, and that this is an intersubjective matter (Jacobsen & Lysaker 2015). Through the participants’ stories of being respected and valued for their competence and contribution at the farm, FDCs may be seen as a service organised to meet this identity-constitution. This is of importance in a time where the participants progressively are losing contact with other identity-constituting social structures due to the progression of dementia.

Strength and limitations

The present study presents first-hand knowledge from people with dementia about how they experience attending an FDC. However, we do not know if those who were asked by the providers and

who volunteered for the interviews are representative of those who attend FDCs or if they are more positive about the service. Critical experiences about the service were not revealed, even though such information was requested by the interviewer. We cannot exclude that the choice of method has influenced on the positive descriptions since the mood during the interviews were good. Additionally, the data are from only 10 participants, which is a small sample, and therefore, the transferability to other populations is limited.

Conclusions

People with dementia may experience that FDCs enrich their everyday life because this type of care provides opportunities for good relationships with others in the same situation and meaningful activities in a natural environment. The farm context facilitates individuality and allows the participants to use their remaining resources, which, in turn, makes them feel like real participants in the day care setting. These findings indicate that FDCs can provide person-centred care and that its care environment facilitates the strengthening of the participants' empowerment and sense of coherence in life. The present study found that people with and without farm experience appreciated this type of day care, and therefore, it should be seen as an important supplement to regular day care for those who benefit from a more active service. Research including those who do not accept an FDC and those who have stopped attending the service would give an even better prediction of who would benefit from this service.

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