

Abstract

Background: The improvement of the experience of mealtimes in senior centres may represent a primary intervention strategy for improving the customer satisfaction of the residents and prevent the onset of malnutrition. However, it is unclear which mealtime interventions may be most effective. The aim of this study was to develop a set of recommendations for the improvement of the eating environment according to the needs and the preferences of the target population. The main objective was thus to investigate the customer satisfaction of residents without dementia by identifying the factors which positively and negatively influence their experience of mealtimes.

Methods: A mixed method design combining quantitative and qualitative analysis was used to analyse the customer satisfaction in six senior centres in the Canton of Bern, Switzerland. An audit was developed according to the state of the art and used for a systematic observation of the mealtimes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eighteen residents from five out of the six centres. Thematic analysis was used to derive content and meaning from transcribed interviews. Interviews were supplemented by researcher observations of mealtimes.

Results: The audit was a useful tool for comparing the senior centres and providing a framework for the interview with the residents. The experience of mealtimes was a focal point for participants' broader experiences of residing in senior centres. Three themes pertaining to residents' experiences were identified: (1) culture of mealtimes; (2) eating preferences; and (3) key role of service providers.

Conclusion: This study highlights the importance of understanding residents' "rituals" and preferences upon their arrival in the centres, ensuring that their wishes and needs can be addressed by the service providers. Furthermore, the residents should be instructed about communication flows and the available possibilities related to food provision within the centres. This may grant them enough autonomy to take decisions for themselves and experience a smoother transition from their previous life into the communal one. Residents' experiences of mealtimes may provide important insight into the influence of the customer satisfaction on nutritional status and future interventions could consider how the latter is impacted by the social and environmental factors highlighted in this study.

Keywords: Senior centres; Older adults; Mealtimes, Semi-structured interviews; Thematic Analysis