

ABANDONMENT FEARS IN PERSONS WITH ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE
AT ADULT DAY CARE CENTERS

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(Abstract)

In my research, I examined abandonment fears in persons with Alzheimer's disease at the Salem Veterans Affairs adult day care center. I observed fifty hours at the center, and conducted open-ended interviews with two of the participants and their respective caregivers. These two participants (Ellen and Opel) at the center expressed abandonment fears much more frequently than any of the other participants.

I found that most of the time, these two women would express their abandonment fears in the form of repetitive questions about going home. Staff used two different methods to deal with the problem: "reassurance by fact" and redirection. The staff was divided as to the efficacy of their methods and whether more frequent attendance would help Ellen and Opel to adjust to the center. Some participants were bothered by their constant questions, while others were not. Using an existing attachment questionnaire, Ellen's daughter classified her mother as having an avoidant attachment style, but Opel's daughter classified her mother as having secure attachment. Although Ellen's behavior at the center fit with the description of a person with avoidant attachment (e.g., extreme self-reliance, activity disturbance), Opel's fearful nature did not suggest that she had a secure attachment style as her daughter believed.

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