

The Convergence of Cultural Festivals and Alzheimer Disease: An Ethnographic Study

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Abstract

Traditionally, festivals provide a framework for communal gatherings within public spaces, creating rituals that reinforce a sense of unity and shared purpose. This sociological phenomenon, analyzed extensively by scholars such as Durkheim, underscores festivals' potential to foster "collective mental states" that strengthen social bonds and group cohesion. However, can a festival centered on Alzheimer's disease—a subject often associated with stigma and isolation—similarly foster community engagement? This study aims to investigate whether and how cultural festivals can intersect with Alzheimer's disease in a way that is meaningful and impactful. Through ethnographic research, this analysis will examine the Alzheimer Festival in Italy, scheduled for September and October 2024, to explore the potential convergence of these two worlds. The study is informed by two main theoretical frameworks. The first derives from Event Studies, which positions festivals as vital spaces for community-building. These events allow individuals to reclaim shared spaces, engage in collective experiences, and find temporary respite from daily routines. Such gatherings, as described by Beck through the concept of "cooperative altruistic individualism," offer a context where individuals can simultaneously pursue self-interest and contribute to the common good. The second framework focuses on Alzheimer's disease and its societal representation. Research highlights the experiences of isolation and identity loss often felt by caregivers, frequently exacerbated by stigma. This study will explore whether a festival setting can challenge societal perceptions of Alzheimer's and foster solidarity among caregivers. Employing participant observation and semi-structured interviews, this ethnographic study will gather data during the festival. This investigation seeks to determine whether festivals can shift social representations of Alzheimer's disease, serve as platforms for advocacy, and enhance caregivers' well-being, with potential benefits extending beyond the festival's duration. Key questions include the extent to which such festivals address stigma, promote advocacy, and improve caregivers' experiences both during and after the event.

Keywords: Alzheimer Disease; Alzheimer Festival; Disease Communication; Cultural Festivals; Health Communication