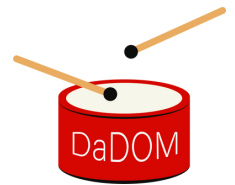


Lesson 3: Sound environment

DaDOM online teacher training



Sound environment

In this third lesson, we encourage students to think about the sound environment and its effects on health. They think about the sound environment in different care settings, what it can mean in terms of quality of life and medication and learn to experience the sound environment more consciously themselves.

A childhood story from Iceland

An elderly Icelandic man once told me a story from his childhood. He went to a remote farm up north with his grandparents to stay during the summer holidays. This was in 1945 when the first tractor arrived on the farm. It was a momentous occasion. When the tractor was started for the first time, everything changed. The cows ran through the pasture with their tails in the air, the horses bolted up the mountain and returned after days, and the hens fluttered about the yard. The tractor changed everything; the silence was shattered.

Of course, all of them, people and animals alike, had heard the breath of the earth and the sounds of nature, so the silence was never complete, but the sound of the engine was entirely different. Here was a new tone, a nuance that was exotic, intense, aggressive, and bulky.

We who live in urban areas today do not hear nature's symphony. We live closely packed, and the external sounds of technology on land and air surround us. People in cities are exposed to a lot of stress and haste, and today's noise wears us down, although we don't always notice it.

But what does acoustics and the sound environment matter to us in everyday life?

Hearing is one of our main senses. We are currently exposed to considerable noise both at work and at home, so it is important to take care of the sound environment everywhere people live and work because noise decreases quality of life. When people get older or have health issues, processing sound becomes more difficult, and a poor sound environment tires people out.



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Improving sound environment

It is one thing to design buildings with a good sound environment in mind, but another is to look at how we ourselves can improve the sound environment for ourselves, our colleagues and our patients in our daily work.

In medical institutions, staff can make a significant contribution. Many devices are vital to people, but this is not the case for all of them. For example, consider the dishwasher, washing machine, or TV, to name a few. You need to plan carefully when these devices will be used. For example, if a ward in a nursing home has an open space, i.e., a kitchen and lounge adjacent to it, it is important not to turn on the dishwasher just before reading from the newspapers of the day as this would disturb those who are listening. Nursing home staff must keep in mind the timing and use of these devices with the needs of the residents in mind. Employees must also pay attention to noise pollution in their work, e.g., in the kitchen and when cleaning. The clatter of tableware is a sound that is quickly amplified and can easily become noise.

Understanding residents background

It is important to know what kind of environment the residents of a nursing home have lived in. Did they live in the city or in the country? Does the sound of traffic or birdsong evoke familiar memories? It is often possible to open a door or window and allow people to hear the surroundings.

It is essential that staff and visitors entering units where vulnerable people live keep in mind that shouting, laughter, and speech from different directions can be unpleasant and confusing. It is good to carry joy with you, but all is well in moderation.

Sound environment as a tool for peace

Listening to music can help people find peace in public spaces. It is important not to assume that everyone who lives together in a nursing home ward likes the same music. People's musical tastes are very personal, and some music makes one person happy while another might get sad. A personal playlist is important for everyone to have, and when listening with headphones, it doesn't bother anyone. Then it is possible to sit in private but also in public spaces. The person is listening to their music but still able to communicate with other people.

Just as a poor sound environment impairs people's quality of life, a good sound environment improves it. It is therefore important for everyone who works in caregiving to be thoughtful and pay good attention to the local environment when it comes to sound environments. Good sound environments are so much more than just silence.



Workplace application - Sound Environment

It is important that care workers pay close attention to environmental sounds in their work.

Here is an activity that can be implemented in at least two ways depending on the circumstances at any given time.

Use your imagination and adapt the activity to your circumstances:

In a medical facility (hospital/nursinghome):

1. Sit in a public space in a ward in a nursing home for 5 – 7 min.
2. Close your eyes and concentrate on listening.
3. How's the sound environment in the department?
4. Are there calming or distracting sounds, unnecessary sounds, silence, TV, radio, visitor or staff activities, clock tick, tap drop, electrical appliances, etc.

Do your check twice at different times of day.

Think about any suggestions or ideas on how the staff can improve the sound environment.

In the classroom:

- Students spread out around the classroom, sit with their eyes closed and listen carefully for about 2 – 4 minutes.
- A teacher walks around making ambient noises that could be in a ward in a nursing home, e.g, television, radio, phone rings, employee talking on the phone, laughter, setting the table, running water etc.

Divide the class into small groups and discuss:

- What was your experience?
- Was something disturbing?
- Was there anything that was comfortable?
- How can you remain conscious of environmental sounds during your internship or future job?