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Agentic experiences within structures of long-term care (LTC)

Fang, Mei Lan; Sixsmith, Judith; Wada, Mineko; Canham, Sarah L.; Battersby, Lupin; Woolrych, Ryan

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Agentic experiences within structures of long-term care (LTC): implications for research & practice

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i. background & rationale

1 Informed by the housing model approach, the objective of creating 'home-like' LTC facilities is to provide familiar and supportive environments for optimal autonomy, independence, and wellbeing (Verbeek et al, 2009).

2 Yet, the theory of structuration suggests that power exercised on human agents is shaped by social, cultural, and infrastructural forces that predict an individual's ability to exercise autonomy and wield control in situations and/or places (Sewell, 1992). This has been understudied within the institutional context of LTC.

3 Using this perspective, we posit that in LTC, staff and residents' agency are shaped by the: structuration of the facility in its built form; policies defined by LTC decision-makers; and social and organisational norms, behaviours and practices.

ii. research questions

a. What types of 'hard' (i.e. physical / environmental) and 'soft' (i.e. socio-structural) structures exist in traditional versus 'home-like' LTC and how do they act as constraints, catalysts or transformative stimuli on individual agency?

b. What are the rules that uphold 'hard' and 'soft' structures in traditional versus 'home-like' LTC and how do they act as constraints, catalysts or transformative stimuli on staff and residents' agency?

c. What types of structural resources exist in traditional versus 'home-like' LTC and how do they act as constraints, catalysts or transformative stimuli on individual agency?

Redevelopment: 'home-like' LTC

iii. theory & analytical model

❑ Informed by Giddens's (1976) notions on the duality of structure, an analytical model (Figure 1) was developed to understand the physical, social, and cultural structures of traditional versus home-like LTCs

❑ The duality of structure posits that "structures shape people's practices, but it is also people's practices that constitute and reproduce structures" (Sewell, 1992, p. 4).

❑ Structures can be both 'hard' and 'soft,' constituting the built environment, and socio-cultural, norms, rules and regulations.

❑ Structures can also take the form of resources, which can be more accessible and available to some compared to others based on the social identities and positions one holds in society.
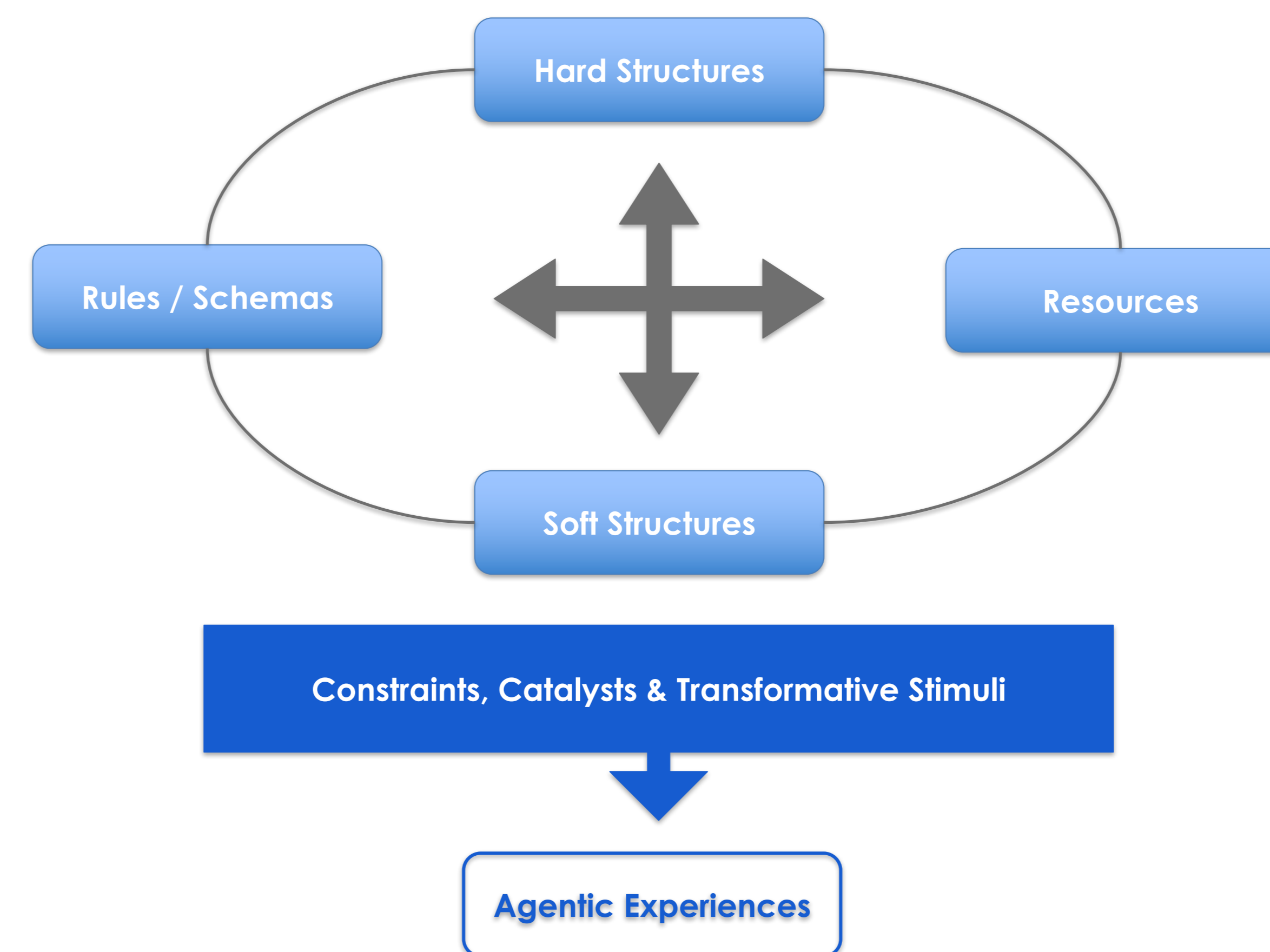
Hard Structures

Rules / Schemas — Resources

Soft Structures

Constraints, Catalysts & Transformative Stimuli

Agentic Experiences

Figure 1. Analytical model informed by notions of duality of structures.

iv. methods & analysis

Study Design: A 2-year longitudinal qualitative evaluation study was conducted in Western Canada between 2014 – 2016.

Recruitment: Participants (residents, LTC staff, and family members) were recruited from two LTC facilities.

Data collection: Total of 210 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted before and after relocating residents and staff from two LTC facilities into one that is purpose-built. These included 50 unique interviews conducted with residents (n=35); 107 unique interviews conducted with LTC staff (n=81); and 53 unique interviews conducted with family members (n=23).

Data analysis: Initial team-based thematic analysis of the data (informed by Braun & Clarke 2006) was undertaken and subsequently coded in NVivo 10. A more focused analysis was conducted following the development of an analytical model informed by Giddens's theory of structuration and analysed according to the thematic structured framework approach (Gale et al. 2013).

v. select thematic findings

a. **Physicality of Place:** "*[with] so many wheelchairs, so many lifts and stuff, even the hallways are … not wide enough.*"

▪ Normative social perceptions of limiting spaces provoke a feeling of being trapped or contained. Institutional confinement was used throughout history to contain those who no longer fit in the everyday social mechanics of society (i.e. prisons, asylums), and perhaps older people **who can no longer cope within the confines of mainstream society** are kept in LTC.

b. **Institutional, rules, regulations, policies and practices:** "*Policy says you have to have the resident fed by 9 a.m. So if the resident isn't fed by 9 a.m., you get written up. And, how are you going to resolve that?*"

▪ Institutional rules limit autonomy of both staff and residents. This type of policy constrains staff members' ability to provide optimal care to residents, and also forces residents to engage in an activity that would otherwise not be part of their routine at home. Hence, although, the built features were made more home-like, the socio-normative day-to-day activities are still institutionalised.

c. **Normative socio-cultural beliefs, values, behaviours and expectations:** "*We're human too … we are all social people … I feel bad when they want me to talk, sit down and talk to them, and I can't because I'm so busy all the time.*"

▪ It has become the norm in many organisational cultures to applaud those who mirror automatons in the workplace, whereby individuals are expected to refrain from taking breaks and engaging in conversation with residents during work hours. This structure is reinforced by both rule-makers and rule-followers.

vi. discussion & implications

❑ Within the institutional context of LTC, both staff members' and residents' agency are determined by the: physical structure of the building, policies defined by decision-makers of the institution; and established organisational work culture.

❑ Agency can be exerted in various circumstances, places or spaces and can present opportunities to self-empower.

❑ Applying principles that stem from the theory of structuration can challenge researchers, planners, and developers to consider the impact of structures on individual agency when designing and developing LTC facilities.

Original (traditional) LTC 1
- home to 147 residents
- originally built in the 1970s as a residential care facility
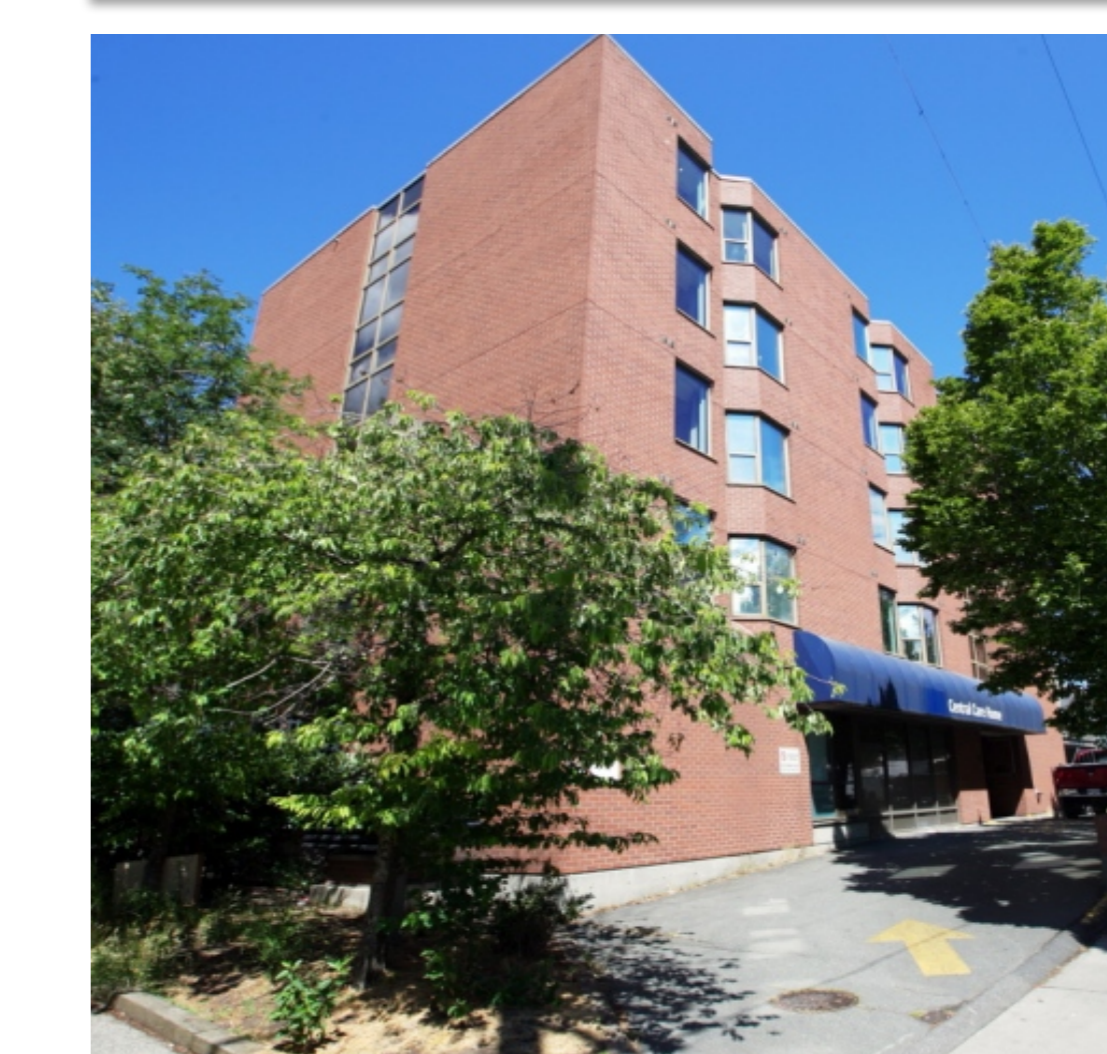
Original (traditional) LTC 2
- home to 80 residents
- originally built in 1906
- redeveloped into LTC in 1970s

CO-AUTHORS: Mei Lan Fang[1,4], Judith Sixsmith[1], Mineko Wada[2], Sarah Canham[3], Lupin Battersby[2], Ryan Woolrych[4] & Andrew Sixsmith[2]   **AFFILIATIONS:** University of Dundee, Simon Fraser University, University of Utah & Heriot-Watt University   **CONTACT INFORMATION:** m.l.fang@dundee.ac.uk