



1st World Congress on Healthy Ageing, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

ABSTRACT 110

Neighbor support for older people in the Netherlands

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Background: In order to meet the needs of the aging population, public policy places greater emphasis on informal support networks. Currently, there is insufficient evidence on the types of support provided to older people by neighbors and how they collaborate with formal support-givers.

Objectives: The main objective of this study is to (i) explore types of informal neighbour support for older people and (ii) discuss experiences of neighbor-support givers, volunteers and professionals of providing support to older people.

Methods: Twenty-four interviews with Dutch neighbor support-givers, volunteers and professionals were conducted and subjected to latent content analysis. Participants were recruited via a variety of health and social care organizations.

Results: Findings from this study indicate naturally occurring commitment among neighbors; in addition to the provision of instrumental and emotional support, neighbor support primary entails carefully watching over each other. Neighbor support is perceived as an essential safety net, safeguarding older peoples' health and welfare. However, neighbor support-givers regularly become overburdened and volunteers frequently were frail themselves, both lacking protection and support from professionals. Neighbor support-givers, volunteers and professionals seem to operate in separate worlds, without any collaboration.

Conclusions: Our findings suggest policy makers should carefully consider opportunities as well as limitations of neighbor support and volunteer work. Experienced drawbacks of providing support emphasize the importance of professional back-up. Professionals should be trained to adopt a visible and proactive attitude in neighborhoods in order to cooperate with and facilitate support-givers and volunteers.

Key Words: informal support, neighbors, elderly

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