



An approach to assess adequacy of the support offerings with the real needs of informal caregivers of persons suffering from mental illness

Oral presentation (Scientific)

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Informal caregivers (ICs) in adult psychiatry are facing a significant burden. Over the past 50 years in Western countries, those who used to be considered as a causal agent of mental illness became unquestioned allies to mental health professionals. However, the willingness of the mental health system to maintain patients in the community and to integrate family into the care process can considerably increase informal caregiver's responsibilities, and, thus, their burden. ICs are facing a risk of developing health problems. Supporting ICs in the difficult stages of illness may be a solution to the need of care in a context of healthcare professionals' shortage. Community treatments are also recommended for patient's recovery. A diversity of support is in place in Switzerland. However, no overview nor assessment is currently available. Thus, it is not known if the offering is adequate with regards to the ICs needs. The question arises then: How to evaluate the (in)adequacy of the support with the real needs of ICs of persons suffering from mental illness?

The presentation will be based on the work in progress of a pioneering study: an assessment of needs and support for ICs in adult psychiatry in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. In order to understand the consistency of both support providers' offerings and supported persons' needs, the research project follows two partial objectives and a third synthetic one: (1) elaborating an overview of the existing support offerings for ICs in the French-speaking part of Switzerland; (2) identifying ICs' needs and obtaining the latter's profile in Switzerland; (3) cross-analysing the current offerings and the needs in order to estimate the potential gap between the two.

Individual interviews and focus groups are currently conducted with persons in charge of activities available to ICs (N=10), healthcare professionals (N=10), and ICs (N=40). These explore the issues related with the very functioning of the offering providers, ICs needs and profiles, and perception of potential gaps between offerings and needs. Self-administered questionnaires submitted to ICs collect socio-demographic data, measure level of psychological distress, level of optimism, and attitude to mental illness.

The presentation will focus on the complexity and relevance of such approach. Preliminary results will be presented as illustrations of data that can be used in an assessment of offerings-needs adequacy. These will be based on support providers' and health professionals' discourse and address representations of *needs* and *difficulties* encountered by ICs (e.g. to be oriented to the (right) support offering) or *specificities* of ICs of persons suffering from mental illness (e.g. stigmatization of the mental illness).

This study allows shedding some light on the adequacy of actual practices and coming up with innovating practices, potentially responding to the needs for care in a context of healthcare professionals' shortage.