

SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN HOME CARE: THE IMPACT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESOURCES ON HOME CARE ARRANGEMENTS

Background

Demographic and social developments justify the assumption of an increasing number of people in need of care from disadvantaged groups [1, 2]. Still, inequalities in long-term home care are rarely considered in the discourse on health inequalities [3, 4]. Several studies point out that the utilization of care services in Germany increases with the level of income and wealth as well as education [5-10]. However, despite increasing research reflected in the literature, the evidence remains incomplete and shows inconsistencies so that a valid statement on the degree of inequalities in care provision is not possible [11].

Aim(s)

This study pursues the question how socio-economic resources of people in need of care and their family caregivers are influencing the utilization of care services in Germany. It is examined whether income and education of people in need of care and their caregivers are related to the use of support services in home care arrangements.

Methods

As a part of a mixed-methods research approach a quantitative secondary data analysis of a survey [12] among members of the social association VdK (Sozialverband VdK) was conducted. The statistical evaluation includes descriptive analyses as well as the investigation of correlations between socioeconomic characteristics and characteristics of the care arrangement.

Results

A correlation between income and the use of support services exists regarding so-called 24-hour care, which is more common with high income. Other income effects can be seen in the extent to which care services and home help services are used and in measures to adapt the home environment. A higher level of education is related to an increased use of counselling services. The assessment of the care situation is more negative the lower the income.

Discussion

The results point out that phenomena of social inequality in care exist and that the options for shaping home care are influenced by socioeconomic factors. Home care is not only determined by individual need but seems to be decisively influenced by socio-economic restrictions. The study also shows challenges in dealing with social inequality and provides orientation for further research, which is becoming increasingly important in view of current trends.

Implications and future perspectives

For a more targeted approach, further research on the use of care services depending on socio-economic resources is needed. As the perception of people in need of care and their caregivers has hardly been addressed, the user perspective should be explicitly taken into account. Therefore, the study results presented will be followed-up by qualitative research in which the user perspective is taken into account by guided interviews with people in need of care and their caregivers. Results are expected in spring 2024.

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