

# Informal caregiving

Organisers:

Ellen Verbakel, Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands, E.Verbakel@maw.ru.nl

Due to population ageing and rising life expectancy, Europe will face an increasing demand for long-term care. Dealing with - and anticipating future - rising health costs, many governments are directing towards a larger contribution of informal care. Informal care can be defined as support provided to people with health care needs by their informal network (mainly relatives) with respect to personal care or housekeeping tasks. Not only do governments welcome informal care out of budget reasons, informal caregiving is also supposed to enhance cohesion in society and to make citizens more socially engaged. In contrast to these potential positive consequences for society, literature suggests that informal caregiving has negative consequences for the individuals involved: informal caregivers experience a caregiving burden and lower levels of well-being; receivers of informal care may face lower health care quality to the extent that informal care substitutes formal (professional) care.

This session welcomes research that enlarges knowledge about informal caregiving in Europe and its consequences. Several perspectives are interesting in this respect:

## 1. Policy

The aim of increasing the contribution of informal caregiving is frustrated by other demographic developments, such as increasing female labour force participation, declining family size, rising childlessness, and rising divorce rates. In other words, while demand for informal caregivers is rising, their supply is in decline. Policy makers will be interested in knowing how to recruit sufficient caregivers and how to organize the health care system most effectively and efficiently. Research is needed that sheds light on how the organization of informal caregiving – possibly in combination with formal care and voluntary work – looks like in European countries and what policy measures appear to be successful.

## 2. Informal caregivers

Informal caregiving may be a time-intensive as well as a strain-inducing task. In many cases, it is the circumstances rather than voluntary choice that make someone an informal caregiver. Informal caregiving then is an 'extra task' that needs to be incorporated in daily work and family life. Caring can involve difficult tasks and a complex relationship with the care receiver (e.g. in case of dementia), which may produce uncertainty, stress, and sadness.

On the bright side, informal caregiving may also bring positive outcomes, such as intrinsic joy, a rewarding feeling, and companionship. Research is welcomed that investigates the consequences for informal caregivers, for instance with respect to their health, life satisfaction, work and family life.

### 3. Care receivers

Informal care may bring the advantage of being cared for by someone one is familiar and likely close with. On the other hand, informal caregivers likely lack professional knowledge and training about the health situation of the needy person. Moreover, not every needy person has access to a network of informal caregivers. Research is welcomed that studies the consequences of (absence of) informal care for care receivers for example in terms of health outcomes, perceived quality of the health care they receive, and life satisfaction.

**Deadline to submit your abstract: 20<sup>th</sup> of December 2015**

⇒ [Submit now](#)