

New ways of aid coordination: results of an implementation study on the digitalization of neighborhood assistance for the older adults

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Purpose As a recent study shows, primary caregivers spend an average of 49 hours per week caring for and supporting dependent relatives. At the same time, these caregivers are exposed to high levels of stress, which can lead to impairments in their own life satisfaction and health. Therefore, voluntary assistance for the older adults is gaining increasing importance, as it supports aging in their own homes and assists caregiving relatives in their duties. (Schwinger & Zok, 2024) Given the decreasing and exhausted family care potentials and resources, there are increasing calls for voluntary assistance services. However, the number of volunteers is limited, which, together with rising demands for help, leads to an availability problem. A promising solution to this problem lies in the use of digital platforms, which are intended to improve the organization and coordination of assistance services. Although there are high expectations for these platforms, there is a lack of empirical evidence on how such digital matching platforms may be sustainably implemented and what specific impacts they have on the efficiency and effectiveness of voluntary assistance services in a local area. The project 'Implementation and Engagement-Promoting Potentials of a Digital Solution for Assistance Matching for older adults' (IPot) accompanies the implementation process of a digital platform in a rural neighborhood assistance network in southern Germany. The central research question is: What factors and conditions promote the successful implementation of a digital solution for the matching of helpers for the older adults? In addition to evaluating practical and process-related implementation elements, the focus is also on examining the benefits of the digital solution in terms of its engagement-promoting effects. **Method** The implementation study follows a multiperspective approach within a focused ethnographic research design and accompanies the digitalization process for a year. The data collection was carried out using guided interviews at three data points from the perspective of the organization and the user group (helpers and clients seeking help) as well as through process-accompanying participant observations. The analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis methods. **Results and Discussion** The presentation presents detailed findings on facilitating and inhibiting factors of implementation and engagement-promoting potentials of the digital solution. It shows how digitalization changes the help matching process and what new matching processes emerge. These new processes are compared and analyzed with existing matching models from the literature to identify differences and similarities. Additionally, the diverse benefits associated with the implementation of the digital solution are critically discussed. These effects concern not only the structures and processes within the organization but also impact local engagement. It is examined how the efficiency and flexibility of assistance can be improved and how communication between helpers and help seekers as well as among the coordinators of neighborhood assistance of the organization can be facilitated. At the same time, challenges such as technical start-up problems and how to ensure the long-term sustainability of the platform are addressed. In sum, this provides a comprehensive picture of the opportunities and risks of digitalization in the area of local neighborhood assistance for the older adults.

References

Schwinger, A. & Zok, K. (2024). Häusliche Pflege im Fokus: Eigenleistungen, Belastungen und finanzielle Aufwände. *WIdOmonitor*, 21(1). https://www.wido.de/fileadmin/Dateien/Dokumente/Publicationen_Produnkte/WIdOmonitor/wido-monitor_1_2024_pflegehaushalte.pdf

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