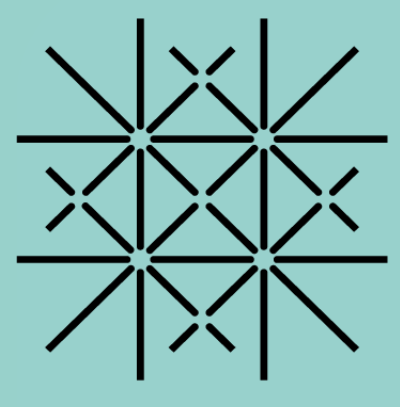




EPICENTRE PARTICIPATIO

Equitable Participation of Older People in a Fragmented Home Care System: An Ethnographic Enquiry in Switzerland

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Background

- Most people prefer to **remain at home for as long as possible** rather than move to a nursing home^{1,2}
- Swiss health policy prioritises **outpatient over inpatient** care
- **Demand for professional home care**: +61% (2010–2019)³; projected to increase by a further 42.1% by 2040 and 62.9% by 2050⁴
- Need for further research on **participation of older people living with home-based long-term care**

Methods

→ ongoing ethnographic research over 12 months

- **Observations + Informal Conversations**:
 - Accompanying Spitex* employees on 30+ shifts, visiting over 120 different households
 - Spending time at older people's homes without Spitex
- **Narrative Interviews** with Spitex employees, clients and relatives
- **Document Analysis**

*Spitex: hospital-external support and care organisation

Findings

Which factors influence possibilities for equitable participation of older people living with home care?

Structural factors → hindering participation

- Insurance billing system
- Staff shortage and hierarchical structures in Spitex organisations
- Care staff working alone, lack of shared spaces for exchange
- Limited time resources at the client's home
- Limited flexibility in scheduling the home care visits

- fragmentation of skills and care
- fragmentation of the care team
- fragmentation of the day of the clients

Socio-economic situation of the clients → hindering or fostering participation

- Presence or absence of a spouse/partner, relatives, friends, neighbours, etc.
- Clients not wanting to be a burden: feelings of shame and/or guilt
- Clients' financial situation and knowledge of the legal and administrative system

Care as a relational practice → fostering participation



Photos: Nora Peduzzi, Sandra Staudacher

Conclusion

Structural factors contribute to **fragmentation within the Swiss home care system at multiple levels**, creating challenges for equitable participation. Our findings highlight that participation is not only shaped by structural conditions but is continuously negotiated through the **relational practice of care**. In this fragmented context, participation depends on the ability of care staff, clients, and their relatives to **navigate relationships and the financial and administrative system**. However, the ability to navigate these relationships and systems is unequally distributed, as it depends on socio-economic resources, social networks, institutional knowledge, and the confidence and creativity to leverage the flexibility available within the system.

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- ² Vik K, Eide AH. The exhausting dilemmas faced by home-care service providers when enhancing participation among older adults receiving home care. Scand J Caring Sci. 2012;26(3): 528-36.
- ³ Federal Statistical Office: Sozialmedizinische Betreuung älterer Menschen, 2010-2019; 2021
- ⁴ Pahud, O., Pellegrini, S., Dorn, M., Dutoit, L. & Zufferey, J. (2025). Bedarf an Alters- und Langzeitpflege in der Schweiz. Aktualisierung der Bedarfsprognosen bis 2040 mit Blick bis 2050 (Obsan Bericht 09/2025). Neuchâtel: Schweizerisches Gesundheitsobservatorium.

