

Needs in Elderly in Residential Care and Their Relationship to Dependency

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Introduction: The world's population is aging rapidly. Along with age, other challenges, like increased levels of dependency and new, complex and often expensive needs of an aged population are rising. Since unmet needs are associated with key prognostic outcomes such as excess disability or premature institutionalization, they are major health concerns.

Objectives: To study the relationship between levels of dependency and needs presented by an elderly sample.

Methods: A cross-sectional study with an institutionalized sample (≥ 50 years) from three Portuguese residential homes was carried out. All permanent residents were eligible. However, those with delirium, who were terminally ill, unable to communicate or who refused to participate were not included. Participants were assessed with the Adults and Older Adults Functional Assessment Inventory/IAFAI and the Camberwell Assessment of Need for the Elderly/CANE. Each resident and a respective staff carer were interviewed for residents' current needs.

Results: The sample included 175 elderly, with a mean age of 81 (sd=10). The majority were female (90%) and widowed (50%) with low educational level (86%, 0-4 years). The mean functional impairment (IAFAI score) was 43.45% (sd=23.52) and the number of global needs was 12 (sd=4). A significant correlation between the IAFAI score and the total of met ($r_s=0.642$, $p<0.05$), unmet ($r_s=0.505$, $p<0.05$) and global needs ($r_s=0.796$, $p<0.05$) was found.

Conclusions: In this sample higher levels of dependency were related with more met/unmet needs. Despite the cross-sectional nature of the study, the findings convey an important message regarding the influence of functional disability on unmet needs.