
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Neighbourhood approach as a leverage for municipal integrated mental health care, Ghent

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Problem Statement: Psychological problems are common in Flanders (Belgium). 33% of Flemish people report experiencing problems such as stress, anxiety, depressive feelings, etc. 14% have a mental disorder and 1 to 2% of the population a severe psychiatric problem. However, about half of those who could use help do not find appropriate help (unmet need) or avoid help. Partly because of the decrease in residential mental health services, some neighbourhoods, especially in a metropolitan context, experience more pressure related to mental and psychiatric problems. The recognition of the importance of supporting people in their own environment is stimulating a search for more integrated work between mental health care and social organisations, person tailored, and within neighbourhoods.

Objective: Although not a core mission of an urban government, the City of Ghent chooses to make mental health a policy priority by giving space to experiment with new initiatives that are anchored within neighbourhoods in cooperation with a wide variety of organisations. These should be exemplary for other cities and municipalities, but also for supra-local policymakers. The initiatives focus on four core objectives: making mental vulnerability discussable, empowering people, lowering barriers to care and inclusion of people with mental vulnerabilities.

Target group: With integrated thinking as a point of view, we approach people as citizens, establishing methodologies to support both people with moderate to severe mental health difficulties.

Actions:

- Citywide organisation of resilience-building initiatives, embedded in neighbourhoods (psycho-educational work in collaboration with Recovery Colleges, front-line mental health workers)
- Connecting mental health organizations with neighbourhood networks to make care both more accessible and more personalized (through quarter making, mobile workers, open dialogue).
- Deploying caring neighbourhoods in which methodologies such as quarter making, multilogem and open dialogue are leverages for inclusion of vulnerable neighbourhood residents.

Impact:

- At the moment, in 8 out of 10 more vulnerable neighbourhoods, mental health projects are running with a neighbourhood focus.

- Yearly around 30 psycho-educational trainings are given, reaching over 400 participants.
- 4 psychiatric hospitals joined forces with the city to launch the mobile workers project, which focuses on neighbourhood networks and a person-centred approach for people under the care radar.

Over 500 EPA persons have already been reached by 4 mobile workers working within networks of more than 40 organizations.

Nb) The results of the evaluation study are expected by May 2023 and can be presented at the conference.