

Living in a home for the aged: expectations and experiences

Summary

Context

The demographic development shows a considerable increase of the proportion of elderly people and therefore involves a great challenge for the different housing forms for the elderly. For a part of the elderly people, homes for the aged represent the preferred form of housing. The research on housing shows, however, that more elderly persons stay longer in the private household and move late into a residential institution, mostly with higher need of care; in Zürich predominantly into a nursing home for medical care. The question arises therefore how the homes for the aged can further differentiate their offer. In this context, beginning of 2010 the 'Altersheime der Stadt Zürich' (AHZ) initiated a survey where satisfaction with the home for the aged as a form of housing and the motives for entering such a home were to be questioned. In addition, the former expectations and the actual experiences in the home for the aged were aimed to be compared and any changes to be interpreted.

Method

Information was collected from 608 residents on their expectations of the home for the aged as a form of housing and their actual experiences by means of a postal survey in 24 institutions of the 'Altersheime der Stadt Zürich' (AHZ). In addition, residents were questioned about their needs, wishes and opinions concerning the life in the home for the aged as well as about the motives for the entry. The longitudinal comparison with a study conducted in 2005 offers a specific level of evaluation: here, persons who had registered to a home for the aged had been questioned. By these means the answers of 53 persons questioned before and after the entry in the home for the aged could be directly compared.

Results

At entrance, the majority of older people were in relatively good health condition. Most were very satisfied with their former housing situation (mainly a private household). However, as a rule they decided explicitly and in good time to register for a room in a home for the aged, mostly because they wanted to do so whilst they could make this decision by themselves and to be secured in case of need for help, but also in order not to have to move into a nursing home for medical care later where they probably expected less privacy and the lack of a single room.

The main opinion of the persons questioned about the home for the aged as a form of housing was positive. One feels well and in good hands in the respective home. The persons are satisfied with most of the aspects, for example the ensuring of a certain privacy and autonomy. Certain aspects of the housing are reported to be missing compared to the private household; however, almost no housing condition was attributed positively solely to the private household or to the home for the aged.

The majority of the questioned residents estimate the home for the aged more positively since they live in one themselves. Therefore, the balance of expectations and actual experiences shows a positive change. The respective homes meet the positive

expectations, and certain residents revised their prior negative opinions about the home for the aged as a form of housing.

Conclusion

The home for the aged is not meant to replace another housing form; it is rather, for part of the elderly persons, the preferred and appropriate housing solution, which satisfies the majority of the actual residents well. Moreover, the results show that the positive expectations prior to the home entrance were met and that negative expectations and opinions were in part positively revised.

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