

Critical reflections on the blind sides of frailty in later life

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Throughout the years, the concept 'frailty' became susceptible to different interpretations and has been approached by different synonyms, which resulted in a confusing picture. Based on a narrative literature review and insights from the interuniversity D-SCOPE project (Detection, Support and Care of Older People: Prevention and Empowerment), this presentation not only attempts to describe these different views on frailty, but by criticizing the dominance of some of these views, it also aspires to move the research and policy agenda on frailty forward. This presentation critically reflects on the blind sides of the biomedical domination of frailty and discusses three main themes: 1) frailty as a multidimensional and multilevel concept; 2) positive perspectives on frailty in later life; and 3) the suggestion of moving from a merely deficit-based frailty approach towards the concept of frailty-balance. At the theoretical level, conceptualizing frailty is not simply an exercise in semantics, but altering the theoretical definition of frailty can have wide-ranging implications, not only for the way frailty prevalence is measured and handled, but also for public or personal opinions on frailty in older people, for care and support practices, and for the scope of legislation. Therefore, the final section of the presentation presents three building blocks for future research and policy-making: 1) adopting a multidimensional, multilevel, dynamic and positive view on frailty; 2) moving from dependency to interdependency; and 3) giving voice to (the resilience of) frail older people.