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Social support for over 65 year-old people

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Aim: To evaluate the social support of people over 65 in our health area by MOS-Medical Outcomes Study survey.

Material and Methods: Design: Transversal descriptive study. Location: Two urban Primary Care health centers. Participants: Out of the 2218 people over 65 seen by 6 GPs, a systematic random sample of 284 people was taken. Measurements: They completed the MOS questionnaire either at home or at the doctor's. Demographic and health data, number of cohabitants at home, and the availability of domestic support was collected.

Results: 14% of those over 65 live alone and 45% with another person. A 6.7% has no close relative or close friend and a 22% has a small social network (less than three people). 12% do not have enough social support. Within the diverse dimensions measured with the MOS survey, 13.4% has insufficient emotional/informational support, 15.5% insufficient tangible support, 18.3% insufficient positive social interaction and 11.3% insufficient affectionate support. Social support is worse in people with a small social network, in people over 85 and in women, being especially worse in the latest aforementioned in two dimensions: emotional support and positive social interaction.

Conclusions: We emphasize the importance of assessing the size of the social network and the perceived social support of the elderly in order to detect and intervene in situations of distress. For that purpose the MOS survey is a useful, reliable and easily applicable instrument. People with a small social network perceive less social support, so the health sector should propose and promote greater participation in community activities or programs that facilitate social relationship.