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The Role Of A Volunteer-Based Organization In Mitigating Loneliness:

A Multimethod Analysis Of A Flemish Chronic Care Association's Impact On Their Members And Volunteers

1. BACKGROUND

- Volunteer-based organizations: crucial role in tackling and preventing loneliness

- Samana: major volunteer-based organization in Flanders (Belgium)
  - Supports individuals with chronic illnesses or care needs and their informal caregivers
  - 140.000 members

2. RESEARCH GOALS

- Prevalence of loneliness among members and volunteers
- Strategies for enhancing further attention to loneliness in Samana's future work

3. METHODS

Multi-method research (N = 1027)

- Surveys (N = 981)
  - Members, i.e. people with a chronic illness and informal caregivers (N = 343)
  - Volunteers (N = 638)
- In-depth interviews with members (N = 10)
- Focus groups with volunteers (N = 21) and staff (N = 15)

4. RESULTS

Profile of members and volunteers

- Members: older, merely female population
  - Mean age = 74, 74.9% female
- Volunteers: very loyal and engaged
  - Involvement of >20 years: 26%

Loneliness

Group	Loneliness in general	Emotional loneliness	Social loneliness
Members	51.6%	37.4%	26.8%
Volunteers	46.6%	20.7%	37.6%

Vulnerability

- Financial
- Double or triple role
- Disruptive life events
- Psychological vulnerability → loneliness

5. DISCUSSION

What works?

- Presence of the organization, making time
- Contact with peers
- Being a volunteer can be a buffer against loneliness, but volunteers can also be vulnerable at the same time

6. CONCLUSION

Volunteer organizations can play a **crucial role in tackling and preventing loneliness**, but there is still **room for improvement** in e.g. reaching particular target groups, using a more personal and tailor-made approach, organizing respite care and establishing deep connections (~emotional loneliness).

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IAGG 2026 Amsterdam

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