

Using Socially Assistive Robots in Aged Care. What Is the Ethical Impact and Where Is It To Be Found?

Tijs VANDEMEULEBROUCKE*

Institut für Wissenschaft und Ethik, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn (Universität Bonn)
Bonner Talweg 57, 53113 Bonn, Deutschland
E-mail: vandemeulebroucke@iwe.uni-bonn.de

* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed

Abstract

The use of socially assistive robots is seen as a possible solution to a growing disparity between the number of older adults and the number of caregivers working in aged-care settings. Because socially assistive robots are embodied technologies that have vocal capabilities, they are used to physically and socially support older adults and caregivers. Although small studies have shown certain positive effectiveness of this technological practice, many questions remain to be answered. A specific kind of question that still needs more clarification, critical reflection and decisions, are ethical questions. What does it say about a society when it uses socially assistive robots to care for older adults on a routine basis? How will the autonomy of older adults be influenced? In this presentation, an overview will be given of the ethical issues related to the use of socially assistive robots in aged care, which are being discussed in the current debate (e.g., deception, older adults' autonomy & dignity). Moreover, some more forgotten but pressing ethical issues will be touched upon (e.g., changing conception of care, environmental impact). To discuss these issues, I will propose the socio-historical contextualization of the ethics of the use of socially assistive robots in aged care as a framework consisting of different levels to ethically analyze socially assistive robots.

Keywords: Socially assistive robots; Aged care; Older adults; Ethics; Socio-historical contextualization