

TO LIVE WITH ANOTHER MAN- elderly women's experiences as stroke caregivers

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Introduction: Most people suffering from stroke are 75 years or older. The rehabilitation period, day care and home help are decreasing, but many of the elderly stroke survivors need assistance in performing everyday life activities. Informal care has been shown to exceed the formal care among stroke survivors and elderly women are caring for their spouses to a large extent. However there is a gap of knowledge of the elderly women's life situation. **Objectives** of this study was to explore and learn from elderly women's experiences of caring for their spouse at home after stroke. **Methods:** A focus group study was conducted that is discussions between participants that share a common experience. The discussions were led by a moderator that was familiar with the topic and made sure that all participants were involved in the discussions that lasted for 1-2 hours. All sessions were taped, transcribed verbatim and analyzed by two researchers. Four focus groups discussions were performed and a total of 16 women participated, mean age 75 years, who cared for their husbands after stroke (mean age 81 years). **Results:** The women experienced a confinement and they did not dare to lose control, afraid that another stroke would occur. They experienced that the most hard was to accept the personality change and especially if there was intellectual and/or hidden dysfunctions. The women struggled in their everyday life, tried to master the situation and think positively not to lose their own zest for life. They appreciated however that they could still live together at home and they wanted to care for their husband. But their attitude towards their men had changed from spouse to caring object and their experienced lack of support from the society. **Conclusion:** These elderly women's life was full of confinement, constant tension and they experienced need for formal support. We suggest that educational groups, day rehabilitation several times a week for the partner, respite possibilities a longer period of time for the caregiver as well as tailored support to individual needs at the elderly couple's home should be beneficial and enable the caregivers' life situation.