

Challenges, dilemmas and patterns of occupations among couples after stroke

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In the western world there is a tendency to live longer, and with older age more people are suffering from stroke. In the Swedish society there is a policy to let people stay at home as long as possible, despite illness and disability. As a consequence family, not unusually the spouse, is given a greater responsibility, and has a more important role in the continuous care and rehabilitation after stroke. From earlier research studies we know that many of the individuals with stroke are dependent on their family members and that family can experience it as a burden caring for a relative with stroke.

The aim of this study was to better understand how the couple as a unit handled challenges in occupations in everyday life at home during the first year after stroke.

In this explorative qualitative study, the interviews took place in the seven couples' homes. A constant comparative approach was applied and interpretations were based on a hermeneutic approach.

The findings demonstrated that the occupational patterns changed not only for the person with stroke but also for the spouse in a couple. Both spouses experienced disruptions in their daily occupations and for some these disruptions became permanent. One consequence of the changed occupational patterns was that the couples started to do more things together. Doing more things together and being more dependent on each other was experienced differently among the couples, but by most as challenges and dilemmas. The couples handled these challenges differently. The findings can be understood as there is a risk of occupational deprivation after stroke and that daily living includes a struggle to maintain reciprocity after stroke.

This study contributes with knowledge on how to support the couple to a well functioning everyday life were both spouses experience engagement in occupations. Occupational therapists need to acknowledge the spouse of a person who has had a stroke and view the couple as a unit in clinical reasoning, treatment, and in new models for practice. Clinical and theoretical implications will be discussed upon in the presentation.