

Occupations and Adaptive Behavior of Caregivers of Stroke Survivors

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- Introduction - Stroke affects survivors their caregivers. Researchers have documented the psychological, emotional, physical, social, and financial sequelae that affect the informal caregiver after the stroke (Puymbroeck & Rittman, 2005). Caregivers experience changes in quality of life once they assume the role of caregiver. It is important to understand the influence caregiving has on the occupations of caregivers of stroke survivors if effective intervention strategies are to be developed. The Occupational Adaptation theoretical model was used to examine the adaptive behavior and strategies caregivers used for occupational performance.
- Objectives - 1) Describe the proportion of caregivers' occupations dedicated to the caregiver, stroke survivor, or to both; 2) Identify caregiver burden for certain occupations; 3) Identify adaptive behaviors used by caregivers; 4) Obtain a sense of quality of life of the caregivers
- Methods - A mixed methods approach, case study design was used for the study. Five caregiver/stroke survivor couples, at least one year post stroke, were observed participating in typical occupations and interviewed for descriptions of occupations. Caregivers completed time logs recording occupations hourly, Caregiver Strain Index, and a Quality of Life Scale. Cases were analyzed individually and then compared.
- Results - Many caregivers worked and cared for their stroke survivor. Occupations outside of work related to the stroke survivor (ADL/self-care) or both (leisure); individual occupations were less post stroke. Low levels of burden but reports of worry were noted overall. Caregivers reported feeling positive about their quality of life and all demonstrated mature adaptive response behaviors.
- Conclusion - Caregivers develop mature adaptive strategies as they become accustomed to their new role. Caregivers reported feeling most unprepared when they first returned home with the stroke survivor which continued several months to years post stroke with particular areas identified. Caregivers demonstrate major disruptions in their daily occupational routines after the stroke, even for stroke survivors with minimal deficits.
- Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy. - Study findings will inform occupational therapists of the kinds of occupations caregivers participate and the burden they face. It draws attention to areas in need of more training and education to address the health and well-being of the caregiver.