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Caregiver experiences and perceptions of the effects of stroke on the family within the South African context

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ABSTRACT

Background: With the increasing prevalence of stroke in developing countries, like South Africa, the long-term care of stroke patients living with disabilities has substantial consequences for caregivers and their respective families. **Method:** This study investigated caregiver perceptions of their experiences, as well as familial implications due to the incidence of stroke within the family system. The assessment, in the form of a semi-structured interview, described the experiences post-stroke as perceived by six primary caregivers. It additionally addressed the challenges the South African context adds to these experiences. This was conceptualised within a systems and biopsychosocial framework, enabling the caregiver and family to be considered in a comprehensive and holistic manner. **Results:** Prominent themes associated with the caregiving of a stroke patient included: role changes, relationship disruptions within the family system, occupational and social implications, fatigue, anxiety, depression, as well as financial problems. An additional sub theme was that the emotional impact on the family system was greater in cases where younger children were involved. However, social support increased the caregivers' ability to cope and this additionally assisted the rest of the family in their adjustment. Caregiver experiences were exacerbated by the inadequate support structures available within the South African context, with the lack of post-stroke education being an issue of great concern. **Conclusions:** Practical implications of this study are discussed, along with considerations of the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

Key Words: stroke; caregiver; family system; systems theory; biopsychosocial framework