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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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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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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

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

_____ _____

Mary Felemengas Date

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CONTENTS

	Page
Title page	i
Abstract	ii
Declaration	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Contents	v
List of figures and tables	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Definition and types of stroke	3
1.1.1 Cerebral thrombosis	4
1.1.2 Cerebral embolism	5
1.1.3 Hemorrhage	5
1.1.4 Transient ischemic attacks (TIA)	6
1.1.5 Silent strokes	7
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework	8
2.1 Systems Theory	8
2.2 Biopsychosocial Model	13
Chapter 3: Literature Review	16
3.1 The prevalence of stroke in South Africa	16
3.2 Neuropsychological consequences of stroke	19
3.3 Psychosocial consequences of stroke	22

Page

3.4 Familial implications 24

3.5 Family caregiving within the South African context 34

Chapter 4: Methodology 39

4.1 Research design 39

4.2 Research questions 40

4.3 Sample 40

4.4 Procedure 42

4.5 Data analysis 43

4.6 Ethical considerations 46

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion 48

5.1 Question1 50

5.2 Question 2 52

5.3 Question 3 54

5.4 Question 4 54

5.5 Question 5 55

5.6 Question 6 56

5.7 Question 7 57

5.8 Question 8 58

5.9 Question 9 60

5.10 Question 10 60

5.11 Question 11 62

Chapter 6: Conclusion 64

References 67

Appendix A: Semi-structured interview questions 80

Page

Appendix B: Subject information sheet 81

Appendix C: Consent form 83

Appendix D: Consent form for being audio-taped 84

Appendix E: Transcriptions 85

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Page

Table 1: Demographic details of caregivers that partook in the study 42

Figure 1: Ages of the participants 48