

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the experiences of formal caregivers within a community setting, and the emotional experiences of the individual caregiver. There is insufficient research into the subjective experiences and perceived role of the formal caregiver, as previous studies have concentrated on quantifying the role of the family or informal caregiver. Eleven interviews were conducted with participants from a community-based palliative care institution. The interviews explored areas of interest that surround caregiving, considering both the positive and negative factors that caregivers consider influential within the emotional experience, as well as the role of a formal caregiver. The study investigated the emotional challenges, motivations, support mechanisms and the perceived effectiveness of the coping strategies employed. The data was analysed through thematic content analysis, allowing for the selection of the most salient themes and subthemes, which converged around notions of caregiving and the positive and the negative elements within the caregiving experience of formal caregivers. The data was considered in relation to an interpretative phenomenological perspective, which allowed for the contextualisation and interpretation of the knowledge obtained through the study, and the augmentation of this knowledge with the knowledge already existing in the field of caregiving. The themes were able to provide an understanding of how caregivers construct their role as a formal caregiver, in comparison to the informal caregiver, and their perception of the importance of formal knowledge within caregiving. The themes also provided an understanding of the coping mechanisms and the contextual factors that interrelate with a caregiver's ability to manage the difficulties within caregiving and their emotional reactions. These findings illustrated that community-based caregiving, although subject to significantly more stressors, also has significant positive aspects that could be fostered to operate as protective mechanisms.

KEYWORDS: Caregiving, formal caregivers, emotional experience, community-based palliative care, interpretive phenomenology, South Africa.