

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

COPING STRATEGIES BY STROKE CAREGIVERS: EVIDENCE FROM A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN SARAWAK, MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Caring for stroke survivors is inevitably a burden to caregivers. It is not uncommon for stroke survivors who are discharged from the hospital and found themselves at home without any help and care from the supposed caregivers. However, in instances where there are available and willing caregivers, a sudden and unpredictable task of caring for stroke survivors require the stroke caregivers to apply their coping strategies due to the demanding nature of looking after a survivor. This study aimed to determine coping strategies undertaken by stroke caregivers in caring for stroke survivors. This was an exploratory qualitative study and data was collected from the caregivers of stroke survivor using a semi-structured guided questionnaire. A total of 18 caregivers were included in the study. The data were collected from November 2015 until June 2016 at a selected community rehabilitation centre in Kuching, Sarawak. The qualitative data analysis revealed that the coping strategies undertaken by stroke caregivers include change of role in life, self-motivation, sharing with other people, crying, trying to forget things that happen, hoping survivors will get better, emotion suppression and self-blame. The study highlighted the experiences by the caregivers for caring for stroke patients and focused on the coping strategies undertaken by the caregivers. Better understanding of these experiences does help the service providers to provide better support and resources for caregivers in caring for stroke survivors.

Keywords: Stroke, caregivers, coping strategies, Sarawak

INTRODUCTION

Stroke is the third most common cause of death in developed countries, after coronary heart diseases and cancers¹. World Health Organization² estimated that 17.7 million people died from CVDs in 2015, representing 31% of all global deaths. Of these deaths, an estimated 7.4 million were due to coronary heart disease and 6.7 million were due to stroke. Another estimation showed that three million women and 2.5 million men died from stroke worldwide every year³. Fifteen million of the world population had a stroke with 5 million death, and another 5 million had permanent disabilities. This has contributed burdens on family and community⁴. Caring for a stroke survivor provides a negative impact in all aspects of a caregiver's life because of its chronic nature and long term of recovery duration. Caring for stroke survivors often give a high level of burden to the caregiver⁵. Hence, stroke caregivers may adopt different ways of coping strategies when dealing with the responsibility of caring for stroke survivors.

Coping can be described as the cognitive and behavioural efforts used to manage stressful situation internally or externally⁶. Coping strategies need the ability to screen the

conditions, look for the information, think abstract and concrete as well as able to access resources and support when required⁷. Stroke caregivers experienced high stress which can affect their physical and psychological well-being such as developing somatic symptoms, depressive symptoms, sleep disorders and social isolation. Caregivers who have better planning and use active coping strategies can cope with the strains resulted from caring for the stroke patients⁸.

Stroke can cause five types of disabilities that include problems with controlling movement, sensory disturbances, including pain, difficulties in understanding language, thinking, memory and emotional disturbances⁹. Thus, stroke caregivers have to face the problems of their care recipients and coping with a disability involves cognitive and behavioural efforts in appealing the causes, meanings and the consequences of disability as well as its impact. Coping strategies include judgements and decisions, and there are two types of coping strategies which are problem-focused and emotion-focused coping⁶. Problem-focused coping is an effort to change or manage the sources of stress, while emotion-focused coping control the emotional responses that are caused by the situation. Problem-focused coping is related to healthy