

SONS IN THE CAREGIVER ROLE FOR PARENTS WITH DEMENTIA A META SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE

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Purpose: The purpose of this synthesis of literature was to explore the concept of son caregivers for parents with dementia and gain understanding of this role from the sons' perceptions through published research literature.

Method: Published literature was searched from databases of Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health (CINAHL), MEDLINE, PsychInfo, Cochrane Database, and article references. Keywords included male adult caregiver, son, dementia, and Alzheimer's. Articles retrieved and reviewed were published from 1984-2004. An inclusion criterion of son as caregiver for parent with dementia was met by 8 qualitative and 4 quantitative studies. A coding sheet was developed with the categories: date published, discipline of author, method, sampling, measured outcome variables and severity of dementia. Data was then collected and compared to determine relationships and contrasts. A list of concepts was created. Concepts were applied to the studies, and then analyzed for discrepancies and similarities developing overall themes.

Findings: Five main themes emerged from the synthesis of the qualitative studies: support, relationship with the care-receiver, motivation to be caregiver, impact of being a caregiver, and caregiver activities. Sub-themes were: formal and informal support, stress, emotion focused and problem focused coping. All outcome variables in the quantitative studies measured gender differences in the caregiver experience. Those variables are: role involvement, interference in life as a caregiver, coping, parent's functional impairment, motivation, burden, depression and gender role influences.

Discussion: Caregiving is a complex process that requires an extraordinary amount of physical and emotional work and various skills, particularly when caring for someone with dementia. There is a scarcity of research literature about sons in the caregiver role. Longitudinal studies are needed to analyze changes that occur in the lives and needs of the caregivers as the care receivers' dementia progresses. Nursing has an obligation to understand the perceptions of concerns and needs of sons thrust into this role. Further research is required before we can develop and implement evidence based interventions to meet the needs of son caregivers.