

Spouses of stroke survivors face lingering health issues

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Micrograph showing cortical pseudolaminar necrosis, a finding seen in strokes on medical imaging and at autopsy. H&E-LFB stain. Credit: Nephron/Wikipedia

Caregiver spouses of stroke survivors are at an increased risk of mental and physical health issues that may continue for years, according to research in the American Heart Association journal *Stroke*.

Swedish researchers evaluated 248 [stroke survivors](#), below age 70

(average mid-sixties), and their [spouses](#) at stroke onset and compared the results with 245 non-stroke controls for seven years after the stroke event.

At the seven-year follow-up, 16.5 percent of survivors had suffered a [recurrent stroke](#). Spouses of survivors reported lower scores in several mental and physical areas—more health issues affecting their lives, less vitality, and reduced social function—not only during the first years after stroke but also in the long-term.

Caregivers' quality of life was most adversely affected by their spouses' level of disability, cognitive difficulties and depressive symptoms.

"It is known that spouses of older stroke patients experience health-related physical and mental issues, and that the degree of their problems is associated with the severity of the stroke, but ours is the first long-term study of seven years follow up to explore this in a younger group of people," said Josefine Persson, M.Sc., study author and a researcher and Ph.D. candidate at the Institute of Neuroscience and Physiology at Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

"Our results also highlight the impact on the spouses' mental health due to demanding changes in the life situations of these families, not only during the first years after stroke onset but also in the long term."

Researchers said juggling work and caregiving is different among younger and older caregivers. "Caring for a spouse after a stroke can be demanding and can reduce a husband or wife's time spent at their occupation, which also can be a burden for many younger families, and the underlying problems can continue several years," Persson said. The findings also have implications for healthcare policymakers and calls attention to the need for greater social support for these individuals, she said.

Researchers surveyed spouses with questionnaires to measure their health status and calculate their quality of life. Age, children, education and work status were also included in the review.

They made subjective reports of [mental health](#), vitality, social functioning and emotional status of spouses by phone questionnaires or face-to-face evaluation.

The stroke survivors underwent standardized tests to assess the severity of their stroke, degree of disability and dependence on caregivers, body pain, daily living activities, depression and anxiety.

Provided by American Heart Association

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