

The meaning of bereavement following spousal loss - a qualitative study of the experiences of older adults

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Abstract

Bereavement and spousal loss lead to emotional and practical problems, especially for those in failing health. The aim of this study was to explore the meaning of bereavement in older adults after the death of their spouse. The participants took part in in-depth interviews. The themes and sub-themes were identified using a hermeneutic approach. One overall theme, Struggling to maintain pride and dignity, three themes and six sub-themes emerged. The first theme, Understanding health decline, included one sub-theme; The difficulty asking for help. The second theme, A painful struggle, had three sub-themes: Striving to avoid feeling sorry for oneself, Searching for meaning when life becomes meaningless and Sensing that one's spouse is present. In the third theme, Feeling misunderstood in the dialogue with others, two sub-themes emerged: Longing for support to achieve inclusion and Togetherness is the best medicine. It is vital to prevent older adults from carrying a permanent state of grief with them for the rest of their life.

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