Exploring the Impact of a Husband’s TBI on a Marriage Relationship

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Summary of the research

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is known to have a significant impact on the life of individuals and their spouses. Role changes, social isolation, psychological sequelae, and relationship breakdowns are commonly experienced, particularly as time since injury increases. This study explored the everyday life of a married couple from rural NSW six years after the husband sustained a TBI. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the husband and wife, and their transcripts were analysed using a grounded theory methodology. Analysis revealed the significant impact TBI had on the wife who assumed the role of primary carer. While the husband was satisfied with all aspects of his life, the wife was found to be predominantly dissatisfied. In spite of the absence of financial difficulties, which are known to contribute to partner stress, the wife experienced a lack of emotional, practical, and professional support that led to an overwhelming sense of responsibility and exhaustion, and extreme loneliness. Results suggest that spouses who are caring for their partners in rural NSW following a TBI are in need of increased support. It appears that if they are not given the support they require, they may experience burnout from physical and mental exhaustion.