ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to elicit and increase knowledge of nature and its events as potential factors, that alleviate human suffering, achieve health processes, increase well-being and distribute older people living in institution the feeling to belong to a major, significant and universal connection. The main research question is: what do nature and events of nature mean to older people, who live in institutions? The research material was collected from elderly living in three institutions by using questionnaires and photo exhibitions on outside environments and some questionnaires according to the exhibitions. This research comprises 90 respondents.

The theoretical perspective and the ontology in this study are based on the caring science tradition at the University of Åbo Academy at the Department of Caring Science. The caring science’s origin is based in human science and the human being is seen as the unit of body, soul and spirit. The significant perspective is an understanding perspective. The methodological approach used in this qualitative study is hermeneutic and the applied qualitative analysis method is an interpretation of the meanings by Kvale (1997). The patterns that rose from these central themes were interpreted with Eriksson’s caritative theory emphasizing the life space of human beings.

The result shows that the significance older people living in institution ascribe nature and its events can be classified as 1) positive events, 2) relations, 3) time, 4) independence and dignity and 5) activity and recreation. The positive events include the greatness, wholeness, the multitude and the aesthetic of nature. The nature brings light, contiguity and spirit and also stimulates positive feelings and memories. The relation to nature can be experienced as a part of human life, but the extent and the strength of the significance may change over time. The time is related to the recurrence of the seasons, human life circle, former time and memories. The independence and dignity stands for the possibility to achieve one self, the freedom to be outdoors and to choose one’s own resident, outdoor environments and elements in the own nearby environments. The theoretical interpretation and the new understanding according to the head themes can be summarized in following sentences: It is important in healthcare to notice the multidimensional needs of human beings. It is important for human being that the caring environment is caring. The human being has a need to expand her/his life space with various relationships. The time is an integrated part of natural processes and associates the human being to the life world. The culture can confirm, build or destruct the dignity of human beings. A confirmed dignity and independence generate life strength and well-being. Activities and recreation is significant to health of human beings.

The challenges of the institution healthcare of today according to the law are to afford and preserve older people well-being, health and active life. To be able to respond to these challenges, the caritative dimensions of healthcare science and the understanding of the life and needs of the multidimensional human beings ought to be included more into the healthcare practice. This understanding is necessary to the decision-makers of healthcare organizations and even of the society to provide sufficient resource.