The overarching aim of this study is to increase the knowledge of the relationship between health and a meaningful everyday life for the elderly in an institution. The research questions comprise 1) what constitutes a meaningful everyday life for the elderly person? 2) Meaningful everyday life: what does it mean to the elderly person’s health at the institution?

The tradition of Caring Science, basic hypotheses developed at Åbo Akademi University, along with the hermeneutic research tradition form the foundation of the present study. The material employed for the empirical part of the research stems from dialogues with elderly at three different institutions in the southern parts of Finland. The transcribed interviews form texts subsequently interpreted/analyzed according to Per-Johan Ödman’s model of existential interpretation. The model involves reconstructing, structuring and finally reshaping. By means of this hermeneutic interpretation, a deeper knowledge of the world of caring and the being of man can be reached.

From the ensuing results, meaningful everyday life emerges as a meeting created by the elderly him- or herself, the people and the world surrounding the elderly forming a unity together. The movement occurs in the shadow of light or in darkness. The light spreads sustenance, recognition, and independence in relation to the elderly. Light spreads participation, community, closeness and the experience of being of use in relation to the other. The interpretation of the participants’ narratives shows that meaning and light in relation to the surrounding world spread an experience of closeness to home, where the movement of time and the presence of nature can be in harmony with each other.

In this study, darkness portrays those situations where unity does not find its place within the institutions. The parts: the elderly, the others and the surrounding world do not meet in unity. The movement, as a consequence, does not occur and the elderly experience meaninglessness.

The study concludes in the following assumptions about a meaningful everyday life for the elderly living in an institution: Movement is created where the unity of the elderly, the other and the surrounding world meet. To be nourished where the unity meets creates the movement. Dignity and participation form the basis of meaning for the elderly at an institution.