The aim of the present study is to describe what constitutes the sources of vitality for the elderly. The study originates in the GERDA-project, a resource center for the development of care for the elderly in certain regions of Finland and Sweden. The present study is undertaken within the perspective of Caring Science as it has been designed by the Department of Caring Science at Åbo Akademi University, Finland.

The material consists of the answers to question 80 of the population-based cross-sectional survey undertaken by the GERDA-project: "Name a few things which give you the strength to live?" The respondents included 3,370 65 to 75-year-olds in the regions of Ostrobothnia, Finland and Vestrobothnia, Sweden in 2005. The answers are interpreted through a hermeneutic methodological approach and a content analysis is subsequently carried out.

The tentative results of the analysis reveal the emergence of four overarching central sources of strength: feeling of communion, the home, health and dignity. Communion signifies relationships. The home is characterized by the respondent’s outer physical dwelling and the inner sense of home. Health comprises different aspects of body, soul and spirit. Dignity symbolises the need to feel needed. The conclusions of present study highlight that the sources of vitality are of decisive significance to the elderly person’s health and vitality. The vitality of a person furthermore constitutes the core substance of health and wellbeing.