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**"There is a Hole in My Heart": An Explanatory Model of Myocardial Infarction in Older Women**

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**Abstract Information**

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Introduction:

Approximately 385,000 older women have a myocardial infarction (MI) each year. More alarming is that those having an MI are at substantial risk for a recurrent MI or death. One reason is the lack of awareness of risk factors or behaviors which precipitated their MI. Therefore, understanding older women's explanations of causes of their MI is important in developing educational programs to prevent or delay recurrent MIs and/or death. The specific aim of this study was to



identify older women's beliefs related to the cause of their MI.

**Method(s):** This study combines qualitative data from two naturalistic studies which focused on women's experiences of an MI. Both studies used purposive theoretical sampling and in-depth guided interviews to answer the research questions. Using probe questions, women were asked: "What do you think caused your heart attack?" Interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Data were coded for women's explanatory models (EM): thoughts or stories on what caused or contributed to their MI to make sense of their illness. Data were combined from all women who were aged 65 and older (N=31). Using content analysis and constant comparison, raw EM data were combined into related categories called clusters. Clusters with similar meanings were then combined into global categories.

**Results:** Women ranged in age from 65-88 (M=71.8; SD=6.0). Most were White (77%), married (55%), had a high school education or lower (55%) and reported annual incomes of <\$30,000. Currently, only seven clusters have been identified: (a) mythical risk factors, (b) legitimate risk factors, (c) medication decisions, (d) inevitable, (e) nothing, (f) burdens, and (g) validation of patterns. Analyses are on-going.

**Discussion:** These results may assist in guiding nurses to target education to foster participation in secondary prevention activities to halt or delay the progression of heart disease.

**Research Completed :** Yes

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No

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