Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in social work research: a current study

Conference or Workshop Item

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Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in social work research: a current study

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Today’s talk

- Background to current study and its aims
- Methodology
- Method
- Analysis
- Some findings with illustrations
- Use of IPA in social work research
- Questions
Current study

- Sought to explore what impact, if any professional background has on role fulfilment
- The Approved Mental Health Professional, a reorganised legal role which encapsulates two major policy changes;
The reform of mental health legislation in England and Wales
The distribution of professional roles in mental health services
Result of policy changes

- In England and Wales the role of those eligible to undertake compulsory mental health assessments no longer exclusive to social work
- Introduces other professions (nursing, chartered psychology and occupational therapy) and renames the role as Approved Mental Health Professionals
Aim

- This research aimed to explore what impact, if any, professional background has on a particular role.
- Also wanted to explore how the role is experienced.
Methodology IPA (Smith et al., 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenology</th>
<th>Hermeneutics</th>
<th>Idiography</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• or, the focus on the lived experience</td>
<td>• or, the meaning and significance for the person and how this is interpreted</td>
<td>• or, the concern with the particular</td>
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<tr>
<td>• to explore the experience of the Approved Mental Health Professional</td>
<td>• to explore what it means to be an Approved Mental Health Professional from their perspective</td>
<td>• focusses on the particular designation of the Approved Mental Health Professional and analyses data in detail</td>
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Research Design

Purposive and snowball sample
- 5 Social workers
- 5 Nurse
- 2 Occupational Therapists

Ethical Approval
- University
- Association of Directors of Adult Social Services
- National Research Ethics

Access
- Local Authorities
- National Health Service Trusts
Research Design

• Semi-structured interviews including the drawing and description of a rich picture
• Specifically, the rich picture depicts their experience of undertaking the AMHP role
What is a rich picture?

Developed in the early 1980s as part of a Soft Systems Methodology for gathering information.

A rich picture is the first step in a diagramming method to portray organisational structures and to enable communication about their complexity.

Two purposes:
- **Evoke** a no holds barred representation
- **Record** this representation
Why use them?

The cognitive process required to draw leads to a more succinct presentation of the key elements of participants' experiences (Kearney and Hyle 2004:376)

Use of both visual and word based research methods offers a way of exploring both the multiplicity and complexity that is the base of much social research interested in human experience (Guillemin 2004:273)
Process of Analysis

• Audio taped and transcribed interviews

• Took photographs of the produced rich pictures

• Imported transcripts and photographs into a computer aided software package
A pictorial understanding and evidence of the perception of their professional role has been provided here, *caught between the police and the ambulance service*.
professional identities as internalised and applied by current approved mental health professionals, including in relation to attributes such as skills here, \textit{coordination of tasks and services}
Emotional and psychological aspects involved in undertaking the current approved mental health professional designation are clearly depicted here, *being pulled in many directions*.
Use of IPA

- The use of IPA fits well with exploring the experiential and it is suggested can be more actively used as a methodology in social work research.
How?

- Particular lived experience of a particular group of people with an emphasis on convergence and divergence between participants – emphasis here is on a professional role. Could transfer

- Identity and emotional experience are main constructs to have emerged in IPA studies to date – this study examined identity and explored the human emotional experience of a role

- Role of researcher and dynamics of the research – not a social work interview but need to be aware of researcher’s own impact on process. Reflection and reflexivity are important quality and validity
Example : Use of a Journal

- Journal housed within software package
- Initially records the mechanics – how does IPA fit?
- Increasingly records the thought and reflections as I did the analysis alongside the stages of IPA analysis also housed within the software package
- Memo linked to each transcript and analysis; description, use of language, use of concepts
Further reading

- Vicary, Sarah; Young, Alys and Hicks, Stephen (2016).
- A reflective journal as learning process and contribution to quality and validity in interpretative phenomenological analysis. Qualitative Social Work
• Checkland, P. 1981 *Systems Thinking, Systems Practice*, London: Wiley
• Edgar, I. R. 1999. The Image work Method in Health and Social Science Research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 9, 198-211