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>
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<tr>
<th>Phenomenology</th>
<th>Hermeneutics</th>
<th>Idiography</th>
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<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, **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
• Edgar, I. R. 1999. The Image work Method in Health and Social Science Research. Qualitative Health Research, 9, 198-211