Research made simple: using multiperspective interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore healthcare phenomena

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Using interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore multiperspectives

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was originally developed in 1995 by Johnathan Smith as a method to undertake experiential research in psychology and has gained prominence across health and social sciences as a way to understand and interpret topics that are complex and emotionally laden, such as chronic illness experiences. IPA aims to uncover what a lived experience means to the individual through a process of in-depth reflective inquiry. The IPA draws on phenomenological thinking, with the purpose to return ‘to the things themselves’ (p168). However, IPA also acknowledges that we are each influenced by the worlds in which we live and the experiences we encounter. Therefore, IPA is an interpretative process between the researcher and researched, influenced predominantly by Heidegger’s interpretive phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. Within IPA, it is typical for researchers to select a small homogeneous sample to explore the shared perspectives on a single phenomenon of interest. Within IPA studies, the focus has been on individual people living within diverse settings and populations such as chronic or long-term illnesses. The focus is on understandings of rich, lived experiences, and, given the small samples, IPA studies have typically not focused on those connected to the person living with diversity or disease. Recently, there has been an interest within IPA to suggest the value of capturing more complex data through multiple perspectives using designs and processes to address this shortcoming in IPA. This may involve the use of multiple participants and a range of data collection methods such as the use of dyads or focus groups. The aim of this paper is to explore the utility of IPA approaches using multiperspectives through focusing on a specific case study to illustrate this approach.

Case study

This case study focuses on an IPA study that focused on the lived experiences of adolescents and young adults (AYA) and their family/significant other living with malignant melanoma (MM). Families and other people important to the experience can provide a logical and insightful perspectives on a shared psychosocial phenomenon. Multiperspective designs are gaining increasing prominence among researchers who recognise that an experience such as living with a long-term disease ‘is not solely located within the accounts of those with the diagnosis’ (p182). For the purposes of this case study, the family/significant others were seen as integral to the experience for the AYA living with MM and their journey together in supporting one another through this experience.

Strengths and challenges

A social phenomenological perspective demands an emphasis on understanding the participant’s experience of the world from their situation and then interpreting how that understanding is intersubjectively constructed. In-depth semistructured interviews, therefore, offered an appropriate and compelling method to generate data that permitted such insights and reflections, allowing participants to reconstruct their understandings of a phenomenon through narrative. Qualitative researchers are increasingly using ‘oint interviews’ (dyad) to explore the lived experiences in health and...
Research made simple

capture the multiperspective. However, the decision of whether to interview participants separately or together as a dyad is an important consideration because it influences the nature of the data collected and having two different types of data. Each transcript was analysed separately both for the AYA and then the family/significant other, whether as an individual or dyad. This was important as the researcher (first author) was not sure whether the findings for the AYA would be different from that of the family/significant other. There also needs to be time built into the study for the data analysis and IPA founders suggest following the IPA methodology, researchers should follow the key steps.3 Analysing the data individually allowed the narrative to ‘open up’ and reveal the experiences of the participant’s as various ‘individual parts’ and then as a ‘whole’.2 3 Throughout the data analysis, the six key steps supported the rigour, transparency and coherence of the findings.

Findings of the case study
This study was organised hierarchically into themes and following the iterative process of analysis, the ‘Life interrupted’ meta-narrative was identified from all the participant’s lives. ‘Life interrupted’ speaks to the various ways that participants’ lives were interrupted due to the cancer diagnosis, and the journey this disease took them on as well as the unsettling emotions that were experienced during this journey. This is woven into the whole journey experience and figure 1 illustrates the core conceptual thread and the interconnection between AYA and the family/significant other. The interconnection between the four superordinate and the 12 subthemes is also shown. The eb and flow of familial relationships can, in some situations, magnify the impact of the physical disease, with the emotional turmoil often rivalling the physical manifestation of the disease.8 11 Conversely, relationships may help the AYA and the family/significant other cope with the disease in a more positive and supportive way. The importance of these unique and changing relationships in living with MM should not be underestimated, and psycho-social research about YPs experiences of cancer would be enhanced through the further use and development of the multiperspective approach underpinned by IPA as used in this study, which is able to capture these dynamic inter-relationships. A visual representation is provided within figure 1 and how the individual voices were captured through the individual and dyad interview.

Conclusions
This paper presents experiences of life events and processes that are intersubjective and relational. Meaning is ‘in between’ us but is rarely studied that way in phenomenological inquiry.4 The meanings of events and processes are often contested and can sometimes be understood in a more complex manner when viewed from the multiple perspectives involved in the system that constitutes them. Multiple perspective designs can be a useful way for IPA researchers to address research questions that engage with these phenomena.

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