
THE ROLE OF PHENOMENOLOGY IN ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRIC RESEARCH

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The aim of this communication is to show how the phenomenological method, adapted for scientific purposes, can help medical research to improve our understanding and our knowledge about psychiatric disorders during adolescence.

Adolescence is a complex process at the interface of many fields of knowledge, such as biology, anthropology, psychology or sociology. Using phenomenology in research enables to explore adolescents' personal experience and subjective perception of an object or event without any theoretical preconceptions and presuppositions. Indeed, phenomenological approach involves a detailed exploration of participants' experiences. Moreover, rather than reducing a phenomenon to a number or an identifiable variable, and controlling the setting in which the phenomenon is studied, phenomenology aims to describe it as faithfully as possible, within the context in which it occurs.

In order to illustrate the role of phenomenology in adolescent psychiatric research, we will present a study about the place of food in family relationships among adolescents with and without anorexia nervosa using phenomenological analysis. The research method was qualitative, and used photo-elicitation – i.e using one or several photographs taken by the participant as the basis of the interview- 14 adolescents and 18 parents were included. Data analysis was performed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method¹. It is an established qualitative methodology that enables to explore how individuals perceive particular situations they are facing, and how they make sense of their personal and social world.

¹Smith, J.A. Interpretative phenomenological analysis. Qualitative Psychology. Practical Guide to Research Methods (2nd ed.), Sage Publications Ltd., 2008