

ECPR7004

Research Methods



Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (2306231)



Content

What is Interpretative
Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)?

What are the core features?

Previous Applications

How can I use it for my own res



What is IPA?

Developed by
Jonathan Smith
in 1990's

Qualitative
research
method

Focus on the
lived experience
and how people
make sense of it

(Smith et al.



The core features of IPA

Phenomenology

- Focus on the lived experience and how people make sense of it
- Aims to understand the essence of the experience from their point of view.
- Husserl – peeling back layers of beliefs.
- Heidegger – we are always in a context.

Hermeneutics

- Recognises that the researcher interprets the participants meaning (making sense of making sense).
- Involved double hermeneutics

Ideography

- Emphasises, detailed and in-depth analysis of each individual case before looking at patterns (zooming in).
- Small sample size (4-10)

(Smith, et al., 2009)



Strength

Rich detailed accounts of the personal lived experiences.

Insight into the subjective meaning-making processes (ideal for sensitive topics such as trauma, life transitions, identity, illness, etc.).

Methodological flexible.

Guided not directed.

Ideographic nature – bottom-up approach

Multy layered interpretation.

(Smith, et al



Limitation

Risk of research bias. Reflexivity must be maintained (Finlay, 2011).

Time consuming and resource intensive

Small sample size -> limited transferability (Smith et al., 2022)

Ethical Challenges arise with vulnerable participants or emotionally charged topics (Willig, 2013).



Application

Health psychology, counselling,
education, sociology.

Complexity, process or novelty
(Smith, 2009)

Honey, let's read a story
together; mothers'
lived experiences of joint story-
reading with
their child: Insights from an
interpretative
phenomenological analysis (IPA)



Application

Open ended research question. What is it like to transition to motherhood?

Recruit small homogenous sample. Homogeneity matters because we are exploring a shared experience.

Collect data – semi structured interviews (rich in-depth conversation while allowing participants to tell their story)

Analyse the data (read and re-read, multi-step approach) key phrases, metaphors or emotional tone. Emerging themes, patterns on individual level. Similarities and differences across the participants. About the deeper meaning.



Applying IPA to my research

How do first-time mothers make sense of their experience of postnatal anxiety?

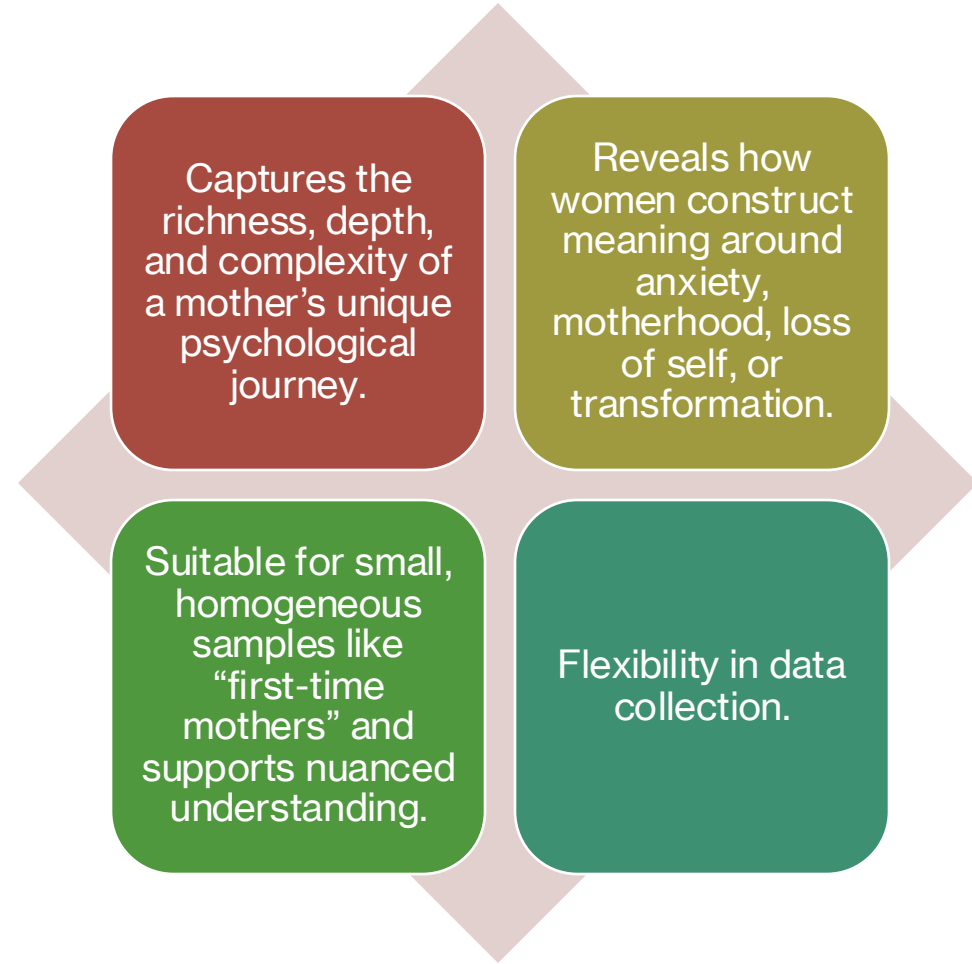
What is it like to live with postnatal anxiety while navigating new maternal identity?

How do first-time mothers experience anxiety and identity shifts in the postpartum period?

Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) highlight that IPA is suited to topics that are “*complex, emotionally ambiguous*”. A strong match for research on mental health.



Applying IPA to my research - strength



Applying IPA to my research - limitations

Limited sample size – depth not
geralisation

Subjectivity of interpretation

Time intensive

Sensitive topic – ethics

Requires strong interviewing and
skills



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