

# Characteristics of the phenomenological interview in nursing research

*Características de la entrevista fenomenológica en investigación en enfermería*

*Características da entrevista fenomenológica na pesquisa em enfermagem*



Raúl Fernando Guerrero-Castañeda<sup>a</sup>  
Tânia Maria de Oliva Menezes<sup>b</sup>  
Ma. Guadalupe Ojeda-Vargas<sup>a</sup>

**How to cite this article:**

Guerrero-Castañeda RF, Menezes TMO, Ojeda-Vargas MG. Characteristics of the phenomenological interview in nursing research. Rev Gaúcha Enferm. 2017;38(2):e67458. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1983-1447.2017.02.67458>.

doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1983-1447.2017.02.67458>

**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** To reflect on the characteristics of the phenomenological interview as part of a phenomenological research in nursing research and to present some practical recommendations for its realization.

**Method:** Reflective theoretical study conducted in October and November of 2016 about the development of the phenomenological interview in nursing, based on the scientific literature and critical analysis of the authors.

**Results:** We present the characteristics of the phenomenological interview and suggest some practical recommendations for its application in nursing.

**Conclusions:** The interview is a valuable tool to access the phenomenon studied in nursing and unveiled by being.

**Keywords:** Qualitative research. Interview. Nursing.

**RESUMEN**

**Objetivo:** Reflexionar sobre las características de la entrevista fenomenológica como parte de una investigación fenomenológica en investigación en enfermería y presentar algunas recomendaciones prácticas para su realización.

**Método:** Estudio teórico reflexivo realizado en los meses de octubre y noviembre de 2016 sobre el desarrollo de la entrevista fenomenológica en enfermería, basado en la literatura científica y análisis crítico de los autores.

**Resultados:** Se presentan las características de la entrevista fenomenológica y se sugieren algunas recomendaciones prácticas para su aplicación en enfermería.

**Conclusiones:** La entrevista constituye un instrumento valioso para el acceso al fenómeno estudiado en enfermería y desvelado del ser.

**Palabras clave:** Investigación cualitativa. Entrevista. Enfermería.

**RESUMO**

**Objetivos:** Refletir sobre as características da entrevista fenomenológica na pesquisa em enfermagem e apresentar algumas recomendações práticas para a sua realização.

**Método:** Estudo teórico reflexivo realizado nos meses de outubro e novembro de 2016 sobre o desenvolvimento da entrevista fenomenológica em enfermagem, baseada na literatura científica e análise crítica dos autores.

**Resultados:** Apresenta as características da entrevista fenomenológica e aponta algumas recomendações práticas para a sua realização na enfermagem.

**Conclusões:** A entrevista fenomenológica constitui um instrumento valioso para o acesso ao fenômeno estudado em enfermagem e para o desvelamento do ser.

**Palavras-chave:** Pesquisa qualitativa. Entrevista. Enfermagem.

<sup>a</sup> Universidad de Guanajuato, Campus Celaya-Salvatierra, Departamento de Enfermería Clínica. Celaya, Guanajuato, México.

<sup>b</sup> Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA), Escola de Enfermagem, Coordenação Acadêmica. Salvador, Bahia, Brasil.

## ■ INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology is a philosophical school, which has been introduced into the science of nursing with the intention of considering the phenomena in themselves related to care. In this sense, phenomenology is identified as a qualitative scientific method that allows the researcher to consider phenomena, which take place in a given person<sup>(1)</sup>. Phenomenology moves between the description of the phenomenon to our understanding of it. Its fundamental intention is to access the consciousness of the individual and grasp what this consciousness is capable of revealing regarding the phenomena that it has experienced. Hence, phenomenology is at the same time the science of phenomena and a method to delve into the experiences of a person in the way that they have lived, experienced, and created meaning<sup>(2-3)</sup>.

To apprehend phenomena such as experiences or events that a person has lived, the researcher themselves becomes the instrument for data collection<sup>(3)</sup> as they delve into the phenomenon through the speech of the participants, those who are in fact within the phenomenon itself and who are also the connective thread running through their speech. It is they who have experienced via their consciousness and who are manifesting themselves through their language. Some studies suggest differences in the types of interview, since there is evidence that some phenomenological researchers use structured or semi-structured interviews<sup>(4-5)</sup>, which can limit openness to a phenomenon, which the person themselves should determine. Others on the other hand, use simple observation. These differences in methodological approach lead some researchers to use phenomenology simply as a description of speech, which hampers the depth and rigor of the method and its philosophical basis. For this reason, this study aims to portray the characteristics of the phenomenological interview in nursing research and to present some practical recommendations for its implementation.

## ■ METHODS

A reflective theoretical study, it is based on concepts of Martin Heidegger, who utilizes some characteristics of the phenomenological interview. A literature review is presented to determine the characteristics of the phenomenological interview in nursing and practical recommendations for its realization.

### Conceptualization of the phenomenological interview

We can define the phenomenological interview as a meeting between two people, (interviewer and interview-

ee), a dialogue, which permits the apprehension of a phenomenon via language. Beyond prejudices, preconceptions, value judgements, categorizations or classifications, the phenomenological interview is both a method and a technique at the same time<sup>(5-6)</sup>. The particularity of the phenomenological interview is without a doubt that it is an open dialogue between two people<sup>(7)</sup>. The interviewer is the very instrument disposed to listen, capture and coexist with the phenomenon. The phenomenon will be transmitted via the speech of the interviewee (language)<sup>(8)</sup>. This speech is sustained by the person themselves regarding an experience that they have had at some point of their life or in the present itself. They have codified it, storing it in their consciousness, that is to say, given it meaning. Therefore, what is obtained is the speech itself already organized by the person, which they have structured based on what the phenomenon itself is<sup>(9)</sup>.

Phenomenology seeks to apprehend the phenomenon itself, not information about the phenomenon. It is not an exploration of the actual consciousness of the experiences of a person, but rather of the experience itself. Via the phenomenological interview we can explore the phenomenon itself, different from positivist research, which explores its causes. Here is the reason for the very essence of the phenomenon: phenomenology does not seek the "why" but rather the "for what", in some way, of this experience and its meaning.

In one sense, some interviews make use of an observational method, characteristics of the participants, the way in which they move their hands, their eyes and their expressions. Nevertheless, these attributes do not correspond to phenomenology in its innermost intention, given that it supposes a "knowledge of the participant" and not "knowledge about them". Therefore, observation can embrace its subject from a position of movement-gesture perception<sup>(9)</sup>, which goes beyond simple observation, needing to seek and accompany the person and even perceive the meaning that they themselves attribute to said gestural movements which are already in themselves "being in the world".

The world lived and perceived by the interviewee complements this, given that the interview is not from the perspective of the researcher, despite their having a theme to take into account. It is the interviewee who will give sense to his/her world, and their vision and perception of these experiences and actions<sup>(7-8)</sup>. "Seeing" in this sense is the apprehension of what the person is giving of themselves. Observation then, is nothing if not a way of apprehending the world of a person, not the description of their movements in the manner of a technique for accessing information. Rather, it is an observation that takes into account the person-space<sup>(9)</sup>.

It is because of this that we speak of investigating singularity and not particularity. Positivist science, to the contrary, seeks representationality. Phenomenology does not seek then, to determine how each person is different, but rather to encounter the singularity of the phenomenon that it is apprehending<sup>(6)</sup>.

Because of this, the phenomenological interview is in itself, an interview open to possibilities, underlining an important difference when carrying out content analysis. We apprehend in this manner the essential or primary ideas. When we proceed via phenomenological analysis, which has as its basis the phenomenological interview, we obtain "speech", "original discourse". We do not seek to give a meaning to these experiences, because the person who is speaking has already given them one. As Heidegger has said "*reflection regarding language is useful here as a decisive manner to completely enter within the thought of the other, that is to say, the thought of the history of being*"<sup>(8)</sup>. Heidegger continues, saying that the very origin of each word of the person has already been internally signified and now is merely being exteriorized.

### Differences from other interviews

Some studies suggest a phenomenological approach, however, they use interviews with other frameworks for data collection. Some of the most common are: structured and semistructured interviews, in depth interviews, and interviews in focus groups with open questionnaires. In what way then, do these interview methods differ from a phenomenological interview?

The structured interview is a series of ordered questions, an order, which must be adhered to. The semi-structured interview includes a guide whereby the order can be altered depending on the conversation, it being possible to emphasize some questions and include new ones. The in-depth interview presupposes the development of a theme, being able to include one or various meetings, depending on the concept or situation from which one derives the emphasis. This generates a semi-structured guide given that one can add questions to highlight certain situations<sup>(4)</sup>.

The interview in focus group assumes a number of people who speak regarding a determined phenomenon according to an interview guide. The questionnaires already have responses presupposed in them<sup>(5,10)</sup>. The fundamental difference is that all these interview methods have a set guide elaborated from a series of concepts or themes to explore the phenomenon, given by a preconception.

The phenomenological interview is a meeting with a phenomenon that is being lived by "a" person who deter-

mines the characteristics of the phenomenon. It is not the researcher who determines it before hand. Rather, it is the person who is allowed to bring forth this phenomenon from their consciousness and give it expression.

### General characteristics regarding how to carry out a phenomenological interview

In general terms, the phenomenological interview is carried out based on a guiding question which orients it. This question focuses the course of the interview, indicating a way of speaking for the person regarding their experiences and actions; emphasizing is a question. If the phenomenon is difficult to apprehend however, one can include two at the most three questions. These are not themes or characteristics of the phenomenon, but rather a phenomenon viewed according to certain linguistic approaches. The researcher, when determining their research topic via a phenomenological approach, should think about a guiding question. This question needs to be understood by the participants, and so, is not necessarily the same question as the one that the researcher asks himself and the question that he will put to the participants. That is to say, the question should be understood by the participant so that they will be able to speak. This question responds to a problem which the researcher has articulated<sup>(11-12)</sup>.

Some examples: a question: How is your day-to-day after cardiac surgery? Provocation: How is it for you to live with diabetes?; two questions: What does it mean for you to be an older adult?, How has it been for you living as an older adult? One can use questions that invite speech to help with the flow of the interview: Can you speak further about this?; Tell me more about this...

### Practical recommendations for the realization of phenomenological interviews

Experience acquired undertaking phenomenological interviews, leads us to present some recommendations for researchers who intend to utilize this method. Physical preparations. The interviewer should have rested sufficiently to be disposed to listen and be attentive, which includes adequate sleep, diet and physical well being.

Emotional and spiritual preparation. The interviewer should firstly distance themselves from situations which could affect the interview or even the possibility of putting themselves in the place of the other. Interviews can emotionally provoke the interviewee and the interviewer should be a supportive and sensitive presence. Spiritually suppose an interior connection: the interviewer should know the objec-

tive of the interview, know its limits and potential and know how to encounter themselves with their interlocutor. If on the day of the interview a problem arises, for example being anxious, it is preferable to postpone until another moment.

Previous meetings. One should access the location of the study on an occasion prior to the interview, so as to allow oneself to become involved with the phenomenon in its context and dynamics<sup>(11)</sup>. Contextualization is important so that the researcher arrives knowing and being familiar with the participants.

Suggestions for dress. Use comfortable clothing so that the interviewee feels totally at ease to speak. Avoid as much as possible using formal dress that generates a social language of power and superiority. Avoid clinical uniform or gowns, this generates inhibition in the interviewee. Avoid viewing oneself in a socially dominant, egocentric or superior light.

Movements, gestures and attitudes. Body language is social, people identify that if your arms are crossed or you yawn "it is because you are bored". One should always and in a decisive manner: assume a neutral posture, that appears agreeable to the interviewee, appearing tranquil, serene and attentive. Turn on the recorder and forget that it is there. Do not sit to the side of the interviewee, one should always be in front. Do not strictly focus your eyes on the eyes of the other, this can be intimidating. Adopt a serene and tranquil posture, receptive, disposed and generally sensitive<sup>(6)</sup>.

Place and time. It is better to arrange a meeting place with the interviewee, where they feel comfortable to speak. Do not be pessimistic. Frequently one asks: How can you carry out an interview with a hospitalized patient in the middle of a hospital ward? It is always possible when the person feels comfortable, and the environment is calm, allowing the interviewee to enter into a feeling of connection with their experiences. Do not close yourself off to the rigorous possibilities of the rational method. Equally, ask the person the time that they consider most adequate to be able to speak. Avoid agitated spaces that are noisy or uncomfortable.

If the home is the place chosen by the participant, seek the most private space possible, free from family intervention. In our experience, this does not always happen and the family sometimes, even when not in the interview space, enters the environment and interferes. Whatever the place chosen for the interview, provide water in case the participant becomes thirsty or emotional.

Transcription. Some researchers recommend carrying out the transcription on the same day as the interview, but in our experience we prefer to leave some time. This will help you to recall the original statements without becoming

overloaded. Do not wait too long so as not to lose the essence of the interview itself. Do not give it to other people to transcribe. Being a phenomenological researcher in nursing implies a significant intellectual effort and as such the researcher should always be immersed in the phenomenon. Giving the transcription to someone else means that the transcription is not always accurate and in a certain sense loses scientific rigor.

Our experience shows that it is best not to carry out consecutive interviews, despite wanting to listen, it always generates physical fatigue. You should give space for rest and in its turn this will help you to carry out the transcriptions.

These recommendations reflect a phenomenologically sensitive posture to apprehend phenomena, and are not simply normative rules. Each phenomenological researcher always decides through their experience when they are able to enter this rigorous subjectivity, which phenomenology demands.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenological interview is an existential approach between two people such that we can apprehend a phenomenon from the perspective of whoever is living it and giving it meaning. This interview has particularities, which should be distinguished by the researcher who should use this method to give validity and force to their research. The interview should take place without moral judgements or preconceptions. The researcher will arrive open to encounter the phenomenon that will be revealed. The interview constitutes the basis for the phenomenological analyses using all the methodological tools available to phenomenology. The phenomenological interview allows the nursing professional to get closer to the person and understand the meanings that they give to their experiences, allowing the researcher to formulate a treatment plan that attends to the patient's real needs and brings a new perspective to their care.

The study presented limitations due to the scarcity of articles to guide the researcher as to how to conduct the phenomenological interview with the participants. Therefore, we emphasize the need for further investigation that can guide the phenomenological interview, given that it is a frequently used methodological and theoretical reference in nursing.

## ■ REFERENCES

1. Tuohy D, Cooney A, Dowling M, Murphy K, Sixsmith J. An overview of interpretive phenomenology as a research methodology. *Nurse Res.* 2013 [cited 2016

- aug12];20(6):17-20. Available at: <http://journals.rcni.com/doi/full/10.7748/nr2013.07.20.6.17.e315>.
2. Chesnay M, editor. *Nursing research using phenomenology: qualitative designs and methods in nursing*. New York: Springer Publishing Company; 2014.
  3. Streubert HJ, Carpenter DR. *Qualitative research in nursing: advancing the humanistic imperative*. 5th ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott; 2011.
  4. Guerrero-Castañeda RF, Ojeda-Vargas MG. La fenomenología y su uso en la producción científica de enfermería: estudio bibliométrico 2010-2014. *Ra Ximhai*. 2015 jul-dic [cited 2016 aug 5];11(2):193-206. Available at: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=46143101012>.
  5. Merighi BMA, Ferreira FC, Gonçalves R. Estudo bibliométrico sobre dissertações e teses em enfermagem com abordagem fenomenológica: tendência e perspectivas. *Rev Latino-Am Enfermagem*. 2007 [cited 2016 sept 01];15(4):645-51. Available at: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=281421875019>.
  6. Carvalho AS. *Metodologia da entrevista: uma abordagem fenomenológica*. Rio de Janeiro: Agir; 1991.
  7. Paula CC, Padoin SMM, Terra MG, Souza IEO, Cabral IE. Modos de condução da entrevista em pesquisa fenomenológica: relato de experiência. *Rev Bras Enferm*. 2014 [cited 2016 aug 26];67(3):468-72. Available at: [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0034-71672014000300468&lng=en.%20](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0034-71672014000300468&lng=en.%20)  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5935/0034-7167.20140063>.
  8. Heidegger M. *Sobre a essência da linguagem*. Petrópolis: Vozes; 2015.
  9. Maurice MP. *Fenomenologia da percepção*. São Paulo: WSA Martins Fontes; 2006.
  10. Rocha MRC, Mendonça LRL, Andrade SN. Entrevista fenomenológica: peculiaridades para la producción científica en enfermería. *Index Enferm*. 2013 [cited 2016 aug 25];22(1-2):107-10. Available at: [http://scielo.isciii.es/scielo.php?script=sci\\_abstract&pid=S1132-12962013000100024&lng=en&nrm=iso&tling=es](http://scielo.isciii.es/scielo.php?script=sci_abstract&pid=S1132-12962013000100024&lng=en&nrm=iso&tling=es).
  11. Guedes SJ, Ferreira SMC. Vivência da entrevista fenomenológica com usuários de crack: um relato de experiência. *Cultura Cuidados*. 2012 [cited 2016 aug 12];XVI(32):18-22. Available at: [https://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/22302/3/CC\\_32\\_03.pdf](https://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/22302/3/CC_32_03.pdf).
  12. Amorim TV, Salimena AMO, Souza IEO. Historicidad y historiografía: contribución de la entrevista fenomenológica para Enfermería. *Cultura Cuidados*. 2015 [cited 2016 aug 12];XIX(41):71-81. Available at: [https://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/46614/1/Cultura-Cuidados\\_41\\_09.pdf](https://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/46614/1/Cultura-Cuidados_41_09.pdf).

■ **Corresponding author:**

Raúl Fernando Guerrero Castañeda  
 E-mail: ferxtom@hotmail.com

Received: 09.11.2016

Approved: 03.21.2017