

Cultural sensitivity and scientific rigor of the Phenomenological method while studying Deliberate Self-Harm in a non-European culture

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Introduction: Phenomenological method is described as an approach that provides scientific rigor along with sensitivity to cultural context when explicating experienced reality. This made the method appropriate for studying the culturally specific meanings of an illegal and stigmatized yet intentional phenomenon – Deliberate Self-Harm (DSH) - amongst Baganda in Uganda. **Aim:** This article aims to describe the basis for granting Phenomenological method the status of scientific rigor and cultural sensitivity and to elaborate on the cross-cultural challenges when applying it amongst Baganda. **Method:** The article is a reflection on the experiences of the researcher when adopting a descriptive Phenomenological method in psychology to explore meanings from participant's descriptions. **Results:** The descriptive Phenomenological method has provided scientific rigor and cultural sensitivity in explicating meanings from participant's descriptions. Although several challenges were encountered, the procedures of the method have provided answers to most of these dilemmas. Cross-cultural challenges are related to the Baganda cultural way of narration, their cultural belief in supernatural causes of disease and misfortunes, the sensitive nature of DSH. Culturally non-specific challenges concerned maintaining an open, receptive, yet critical attitude when applying the procedures of method. **Conclusion:** The descriptive Phenomenological method has scientific rigor and it enhances the role of consciousness, intentionality and reflectivity in understanding an experiential phenomenon like DSH. The method provides adequate cultural sensitivity and amplifies the role of context in explicating experienced reality. Verbatim transcription is problematic in cross-cultural research where the interview is conducted in local language that is not used in communication to the scientific world.

Keywords: Phenomenological method, Phenomenological reduction, scientific rigor, cultural sensitivity, Deliberate Self-Harm.

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INTRODUCTION Phenomenological method is presented as one that offers scientific rigour along with sensitivity towards participants' emotions and context. It is a method that focuses on the meanings actors impute to their intentional actions and everyday situations. This made the method an obvious choice for studying the culturally specific contexts of an illegal and stigmatized Deliberate Self-Harm (DSH) phenomenon in Uganda. The Phenomenological method is developed based on the culture of the western societies but the researcher has employed it to study the meanings of DSH amongst the Baganda, the largest ethnic group in Uganda. In Baganda culture, the individual is seen

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as representing the family, and exposure of family shame to outsiders is also highly stigmatized. As Liamputtong (2010) observed in cross-cultural studies, there are always challenges related to cultural background that the researcher has to be aware of. In this article, we discuss the scientific rigour of this method and the challenges of using this method in such a non-European cultural setting. This study is the first of its kind using a descriptive Phenomenological approach in Uganda.

In this article the authors introduce the Husserlian philosophy behind the Phenomenological method, explain the descriptive Phenomenological method in psychology, describe the scientific rigour in applying the method in the Phenomenological inquiry during data collection and the descriptive Phenomenological data analysis; the study population is described, the challenges encountered using the method are discussed and conclusions are made. The philosophy is to help the reader understand the background from which the descriptive Phenomenological method in psychology evolved. This method is described to help the reader appreciate the modification of the philosophy to meet the scientific and Phenomenological criteria in psychological research. The application of the method in this study is described in detail to demonstrate the rigorous nature in applying the method, and to appreciate why the researcher preferred this method in exploring meanings of DSH phenomenon. Cross-cultural challenges, expressively those related to the method itself, are also discussed.

Philosophy of the Phenomenological method

Edmund Husserl started the Phenomenological philosophy in the beginning of the 20th century and other philosophical thinkers like Heidegger, Sartre, Merleu-Ponty, amongst others, extended it further (Tymieniecka, 1989; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). However, Phenomenology has consistently maintained its initial philosophical focus on epistemological matters. It has progressed as a philosophical method to explore structures of consciousness and the kind of objects that present themselves to consciousness (Giorgi, 2009). Husserlian transcendental Phenomenological philosophy aims at “going back to the things themselves” in order to capture their “original givenness” (Husserl, 1970). This philosophy uses the first-person perspective as a satisfactory method of inquiry through which the essence of the phenomenon is disclosed (Muoustakas, 1994; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). According to the aim of this philosophy, things must be instantly intuited as vital basics of consciousness and analyzed in terms of their critical structures which are necessary in understanding the experience of the other (Mortari, 2008).

METHODS

Descriptive Phenomenological method

In this study, the researcher has adopted the descriptive Phenomenological method in psychology which is a modified Husserlian approach. Giorgi modified the philosophical Phenomenology method to meet scientific and Phenomenological criteria that are necessary for psychological understanding of the everyday situation (Giorgi, 2009). The goal is to ensure that recommendable scientific research on a psychological phenomenon is conducted. The modification includes data collection from others rather than from the analyzer (researcher) her/himself, as it is done in philosophical approach (Giorgi, 2009). In the scientific method, data is collected from other people to avoid the bias which could be introduced in the research process. In this scientific approach the transcendental Phenomenological attitude is changed to a psychological Phenomenological attitude. With this kind of attitude, the objects of experience are limited to the phenomenon as presented but not to the universality level. A psychological perspective is employed instead of pure consciousness (Giorgi, 2009). This makes it more suitable for psychological analyses of human conscious experiences of everyday life. In this case the pure consciousness is avoided in order to bring meanings closer to the level of lived reality at which psychologically lived experiences are found (Giorgi, 2009).

The method prescribes that the researcher adopts the psychological Phenomenological attitude that helps to view everything in the raw data that is critical in understanding the other's consciousness, perceiving it without posting any existential claim of it. At this level the natural attitude which an

individual exhibits in the everyday world, where nearly all things are merely taken for granted, is set aside (Giorgi, 2009). The Phenomenological reduction helps to enhance the manifestation of consciousness that is critical in the uncovering of essential meanings of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009). The reduction involves “bracketing” of the prior knowledge or presuppositions or theoretical prejudices to free one’s mind, which permits facing the phenomenon as it appears in the one’s consciousness. This is also called the “epoche” (eg. Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). It gives rise to increased attention and concentration on the unprejudiced sources of the other’s experience (Mortari, 2008). In addition, the Phenomenological procedure of free imaginative variation is used to establish what is crucial about the object of consciousness (Giorgi, 1985; 2009). That is, the researcher puts aside the aspects of other’s experience that are not critical in understanding the phenomenon. This enhances grasping the basic characteristics that account for the particular phenomenon in question but without distorting the other’s experience as a whole (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). The difference is that in this scientific method the search is not for essence but the psychological structure of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009).

Phenomenological inquiry

Phenomenological inquiry gives the initiative to the participants to express their experiences and meanings. Participants are largely in control of the story telling process and have the freedom to draw a line between personal but sharable aspects of the phenomenon and those that should be kept confidential. To begin a conversation, the Phenomenological researcher asks an open-ended question to orient the interview. For example, in this study after explaining thoroughly what the study is all about, and after the recruited persons verbally consented to both participation into the study and audio recording of the interview, the researcher asked the participants “Tell me about the circumstances that led to your self-harm and what actually happened”. In doing so, she left the initiative to the participant to carry on with the story telling, and listened with respect to facilitate the story telling processes and to observe all the non-verbal expressions. The researcher maintained an open receptive attitude that is necessary to comprehend the other’s experience (Merleau Ponty, 1962), and practiced Phenomenological reduction, which enhanced the level of delicacy in handling participants. Delicacy permits the willingness to welcome the reality of the other faithfully (Mortari, 2008). The researcher used probes (questions) cautiously to avoid re-evoking traumatic feelings which are usually targeted in a therapeutic interview.

We found out that the majority of the persons in treatment facilities because of self-harm did not hesitate to express their story. At the onset, some participants needed encouragement and some prompting. Once underway, the free-flowing talk required few prompts for some individuals. For others, the researcher needed to carry out more probing. The researcher understands the culture of Baganda and this enabled her to embrace the crude, warm, fresh language of the participants. She listened attentively and with respect, allowing enough time for each participant to express themselves; this facilitated exploration of the individual’s perceptions and experiences concerning the phenomenon. The participants presented their experience the way they wished which allowed comprehending the participant’s experience as it is for him or her. The researcher used probes to ensure that all upcoming themes are explored extensively in each interview.

Phenomenological data analysis

The researcher has manually carried out a case-by-case analysis using descriptive Phenomenological analysis to ensure that the entire descriptions are analyzed in detail. To start analysis, the researcher adopts the scientific Phenomenological attitude, and is mindful of the phenomenon under study. Phenomenological reduction and free imaginative variation procedures are used extensively in the analysis. The method has four rigorous steps which are implemented systematically. These are as follows according to Giorgi (1985; 2009):

The first step is that of reading the entire description for the *sense of the whole*. The researcher gets a general sense of the whole description at the end of the step. This is important based on the holistic nature of the method where meaning units within the description may have onward and

backward orientation. The analysis becomes complete when all references to the part under analysis can easily be made within the description. The researcher reads the description within the psychological Phenomenological attitude.

The second step is that of *determining meaning units*. The researcher re-reads the description and every time a change in meaning of the experience occurs, a mark is placed at that point within the description. Re-reading the description is slowed down in order to dwell upon the circumstances in all its details. The meaning units are discriminated from Phenomenological psychological perspective. This means that each meaning unit must contain a psychological meaning in consideration of the phenomenon itself. This step results in a series of meaning units that are sensitive to psychological reality and in relation to the phenomenon itself. It also makes the description manageable. This has helped the researcher to remain faithful to the participants' experience because all the data is considered and analyzed.

The third step involves transforming the raw data in each meaning unit into *Phenomenological psychological sensitive expressions*. In this process, the researcher scrutinizes each meaning unit to ascertain how to express the participant's psychological meaning in a more satisfactory way. Extensive free imaginative variation procedure is used in addition to the scientific Phenomenological attitude adopted. In this procedure the researcher thinks through the different psychological expressions in consideration to the phenomenon itself. The most appropriate general invariant psychological expression intuited from a particular meaning unit is selected. This process is repeated for all the meaning units. The context of the participant's experience contributes to the psychological meaning. This step results in a series of transformed meaning units into invariant psychological expressions that are sensitive to the phenomenon under study. The psychological expressions are expressed in more general terms so that results from several participants can be integrated. This third step is critical, and the researcher has devoted much more time to it. The researcher ensures that the invariant psychological expressions derived are accessible to any other researcher who takes on the scientific Phenomenological psychological attitude. This helps to fulfill the intersubjective criteria of the method. The method functions in such a way that psychological reality is constituted rather than merely seen and dealt with (Giorgi (1985; 2009). The researcher has asked herself different questions to make more psychological reflections on different meaning units in order to uncover psychological reality. For various meaning units the research posed questions like; "What does the statement reveal about the phenomenon? How is it relevant to the phenomenon? What does the meaning unit express that is not expressed by any others?" and so on. The psychological meanings that result from the transformation of the meaning units form the basis for describing the general psychological structure.

The fourth step, the *general psychological structure of experience* of the phenomenon is established. This involves synthesis of psychological expressions from the meaning units, using the free imaginative variation and selecting out the truly essential psychological meanings. These are expressed in general terms as constituents that form the psychological structure of the experience for the phenomenon under study. To attain an appropriate general psychological structure, eidetic intuitions given to the researcher's consciousness are also used to intuit the psychological meaning of the meaning units. The general constituents that are determined help the researcher to incorporate other participants' structures. The constituents are distinct but interrelated categories. The general psychological structure underscores the psychological understanding of the life world phenomenon. It presents the constituents that are essential for that particular phenomenon to manifest itself. The general psychological structure is presented as the final outcome of this stage.

Study population

This is a cultural study that targeted Baganda, the largest ethnic group in Uganda. Their kingdom is called Buganda which covers the largest parts of south and central Uganda with several administrative districts. The Baganda have lived as Buganda kingdom since the 16th century (Kyewalyange, 1976). It is a well known kingdom and was the most organized of the interlacustrine kingdoms of Uganda

(Sebina-Zziwa, 1999). Baganda is plural and Muganda is singular as terms used to refer to the people of the Buganda kingdom. They are Bantu speaking people and their language is Luganda, a Bantu dialect that uses prefixes, infixes and suffixes in classifying both living and non-living things (Muliira, 1967). The cultural framework of Baganda is one of interdependency (Orley, 1970). Cultural framework refers to a way of interpreting ones surroundings that is consistent with the dimensions of one's culture (Bruner, 1990; D'Andrade, 1987; Shweder, 1993). It consists of language, a set of shared social understandings, representations and practices that guide our interpretation of the world in daily life (D'Andrade, 1987; Quinn & Holland, 1987). The cultural framework is also created and reinforced through linguistic practices, the artifacts, and various practices that people experience and ideas promoted by their societies (Kitayama & Markus, 1994). The cultural beliefs, norms and values of Baganda have characterized the study participants' experiences of Deliberate Self-Harm. The method has helped to utilize the role of context in understanding conscious phenomenon from such a cultural group. This made the Phenomenological method approach suitable for this study.

CHALLENGES OF THE DESCRIPTIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD

In employing the Phenomenological method, the researchers have encountered some challenges as they progressed through the research process. The researchers have experienced some cross-cultural challenge during data collection process and others challenges are related to maintaining an open and receptive attitude that is critical in descriptive Phenomenological data analysis. The challenges include; the cultural way of narration, the cultural belief in supernatural powers (*spirits*), and the sensitive nature of Deliberate Self-Harm. The researcher has found the practice of the psychological Phenomenological reduction and the free imaginative variation quite strenuous. However despite the challenges, the Phenomenological method has provided detailed exploration of the phenomenon which has created some in-depth understanding of DSH.

The challenge of the cultural way of narration

The Baganda have their way of speaking that is not so direct. At times they speak about issues in an indirect way and in many instances the meaning is hidden from those who do not understand the language. For example; one may refer to perturbation as 'I felt my brain melting' or unbearable psychological pain as 'feeling the heart is on fire'. Another aspect is that they speak about issues in a general form without specifics. For example, one can refer to suicidal intent by saying that 'in such circumstances the wise just kills him/herself'. This means that the individual has suicidal thoughts and can engage in self-harm. They speak about significant others in a cautious ways and often refer to such people by describing their position in society or home. For example, a woman may refer to her co-wife as an elder or younger sister depending on who got married into the home first regardless of age, or refer to her husband as if he is an employer or a parish chief. A person who does not know the language may not understand the person being referred to.

The participants narrated their experiences in the usual way of talking using their everyday language. The researcher found this cultural way of narration somehow challenging given the fact that the Phenomenological inquiry requires a spontaneous flow of information. The researcher is an indigenous person who understood the meaning of the expressions participants used but she avoided to take things for granted. And in some situations she used several probes to cross-check the meaning. The use of several probes to make the interview self-communicating disrupted the spontaneous flow of the narratives in some instances. This might have affected the quality of some interviews. According to Kvale (1996), the quality of the interview depends on the extent to which it is spontaneous. For example, the participant might have doubted the researcher's knowledge on the culture of Baganda. This can affect the interaction between the participant and the researcher in cross-cultural research (Liamputtong, 2010).

The challenge of the language spilled over from the data collection to the data management process of verbatim transcription and translation. The Phenomenological method dictates that all the data

collected must be subjected to data analysis in order to do justice and maintain faithfulness to the other's experience (Giorgi, 2009). The method puts emphasis on verbatim transcription of the whole recorded interview. Verbatim transcription combined with observations of participants' non-verbal communication is equated to the reliability and validity scientific procedures of the quantitative methods (Maclean *et al*, 2004) The Baganda language has several vocabularies, expression of feelings and interjections that do not have their direct equivalence in English, the language adopted by the researcher to communicate findings. Often, the researcher had to describe things that could not be directly translated into English. For example 'okutta omukaago' an expression in Luganda which means a ritual performed and people vow to love one another for ever. This does not have a direct equivalence in English.

The challenge of the cultural belief in supernatural powers

The Baganda believe that spirits are largely responsible for causing a wide range of diseases and misfortunes including influencing people to harm themselves (Orley, 1970). The suicidal phenomenon is highly stigmatized among the Baganda because of such an attribution. Some Baganda believe that an extremely dreadful spirit influences someone to engage in suicidal behavior and if a person dies as a result of such an evil spirit, his or her own spirit that lives after that person's death becomes equally dreadful. They believe that such an evil spirit lingers within the family causing other members of family to engage in suicidal behavior. It is such a great misfortune to the family that many times they try to hide information regarding suicidal behavior to avoid stigma. The researcher spent more time creating rapport to ensure that the participant gain trust and confidence to open up to her. The researcher also endeavored to explain in detail information concerning the study to enable participants make an informed consent of whether to participate or not. She emphasized the issues of confidentiality and voluntary participation in research.

The belief in supernatural causes of self-harm featured in several of the participants' stories. The researcher observed an interruption in the spontaneous flow of the Phenomenological inquiry possibly as result of this belief in some instances. Some participants have hesitated to carry on with their narration and in some instances they have made long pauses after mentioning issues to do with supernatural causes. However, they did not give up carrying on with the interview even after reminding them that they have the right to terminate their participation if they opted to do so. In some instances they have appeared to be selecting what to say and what to leave out. One participant excused herself and left the interview room for a while, but eventually she returned and went on with her narration. However, she appeared fearful and did not want to explain things to do with supernatural causes anymore.

Although participants who attributed their self-harm to supernatural causes appeared confident in what they raised, they never wanted to explain details about it. The researcher did not put pressure on them to do so. One participant expressed extreme fear and worry after mentioning that her relatives did not like her and that they had resorted to bewitching her. She stopped talking suddenly and she appeared fearful but after some time she voluntarily decided to continue with the interview. She did not want to mention anymore that concerned spirits after that. In such situations, the researcher exercised much patience and did not pressurize participants to say things they never wanted to share. The researcher used the participants' silence constructively to observe the non verbal communication. The researcher demonstrated empathy but without turning the research into a therapeutic process.

The challenge of the sensitivity of the nature of DSH

Traditionally in Africa, and particularly in Uganda, suicidal behavior is viewed with extreme social condemnation and considered as a criminal act in many of the modern statute books on the continent (Kinyanda *et al*, 2004). As a result, it has drawn cultural sanctions including concealment, which makes it difficult to investigate the phenomenon (German, 1987). In this study, some of the participants had mistaken the researcher as a government law enforcement agent. They feared her using their information to take them to courts of law. Indeed, two participants did not participate in the study

because they declined to audio record their stories despite understanding that the researcher did not have any connection with law enforcement. The researcher devoted more time creating rapport to alleviate such fears from participants but without coercing them into research.

The challenge related to analysis

The descriptive Phenomenological four steps of analysis are quite systematic with procedures that make it rigorous to explore conscious experiences in order to establish psychological realities. These procedures demand a great deal of time and concentration to apply them in a correct way. The practice of the Phenomenological reduction is a continuous process throughout the process of analysis. The researcher has to keep on putting away her prior knowledge to ensure that she does not engage it in the current analysis. And even after sensing a psychological reality, again she has to cross check it and ensure that the meaning does not carry biases from her preconceptions. The researcher has to keep the critical other in mind all the time during the analysis. In this study, she has spent time scrutinizing distinct meaning units and varying psychological expression to reach an invariant psychological meaning through the use of free imaginative variation procedure. The researcher has found the practice of the method extremely tedious but very interesting and rewarding. The results are encouraging and portray the value of applying the scientifically rigorous descriptive Phenomenological method to analyze cultural context beside the DSH phenomenon.

DISCUSSION The development of the Phenomenological method is based on the culture of the European society where people belong to an individualistic cultural framework. The researcher has applied the method in an African culture where people belong to *collectivistic society*. This has led the researcher to encounter some cross-cultural issues. In individualistic societies, the “Self” is clearly demarcated and highly distinguished (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Individuals are often quite fluent, spontaneous and not afraid of anybody else when talking about personal issues. In addition, the interviews are conducted in the local language which is also used in analysis and communicating results in the scientific community. This implies that verbatim transcription is much easier despite other well known problems.

Baganda belong to a cultural framework of interdependence (*collectivistic societies*) and in such societies, the “Self” is in relationship with significant others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This affects one’s willingness to talk freely about personal matters because such matters mostly arise in relation to significant others. In some instances, this has disrupted the spontaneity that is required in the Phenomenological inquiry. For example, the researcher has observed that some participants did not want to talk about some aspects of their experiences. This could possibly be explained in terms of the interdependent nature of the Baganda’s cultural framework which is strengthened through their process of socialization.

Socialization allows individuals to acquire various skills and knowledge required for daily living and much of the cultural learning takes place here (Giddens, 1993). People from an interdependent cultural perspective are socialized to regulate their inner personal thoughts and feelings so as to maintain good social relationships which are desirable in ensuring interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In such societies the emphasis is put on self-harmonizing social behavior which brings about feelings of satisfaction that one is a worthy member of that particular cultural group or community (Takata, 1987). With the cultural background of the Baganda, some of the participants might have decided to be cautious of what to say in order to conform to their cultural norms.

In the interdependent cultural framework of Baganda, the cultural norm of withholding family secrets is emphasized (Orley, 1970). Family members are obliged to withhold and never to tell any outsider information that can cause shame or social maladjustment to the family. However, evidence shows that Deliberate Self-Harm is based upon a variety of factors among which family conflicts, tensions and patterns of interaction predominate (Brent *et al*, 1996). In fact, family secrets like sexual, psychological or physical abuse, family breakdown and violence in all forms can act as precipitating factors of the suicidal behavior (Howard *et al*, 2003). Evidence has shown that the desire to maintain a

positive view of the family may be extremely powerful in interdependent cultures. In this perspective, it becomes extremely important, and feels good or right to be sensitive and responsive to the expectations of others, for instance one's family (Kitayama & Markus, 1994). Thus, participants who appeared to select what to say might have left out certain things in order to conform to the cultural norms and family stereotypes. The researcher has found this as a challenge, but the Phenomenological method gives liberty to the participant to tell what they are willing to disclose.

Participants who have strongly held the cultural belief in supernatural cause of their suicidal acts, did not give details pertaining to that belief. They did not like exploring this aspect of their experience. This is consistent with observations made in some other studies exploring such cultural beliefs. In one of these studies, researchers noted that some people avoided talking about supernatural causes of disease for fear of being regarded as primitive or having backward thinking (Okello *et al*, 2005). It is also possible that participants in this study might have feared to talk about spirits when they are still in vulnerable situation or they might have experienced fear of some sort. It is also possible that they perceived the researcher to be in the category of those who disregard things to do with supernatural beings.

The researcher observed that the law on suicidal behavior as a criminal offense is not strictly enforced in Uganda, which is also an observation that Kinyanda and colleagues (2004) made while conducting a quantitative study on the same subject. The researcher did not encounter any interruptions from government law enforcement agents seeking Deliberate Self-Harm criminals. However, some participants expressed fear concerning the law. The researcher took time to alleviate such fears related to criminalizing DSH behavior and thus built participants' confidence to participate in the study after informed consent. The researcher explained this clearly to participants who raised this concern but without coercing them to take part in the study. The researcher stressed voluntary participation after informed consent and discussed confidentiality issues as well according to other researcher (Kvale, 1996; Liamputtong, 2010).

Understanding a sensitive phenomenon like that of Deliberate Self-Harm necessitates being faithful to the phenomena. In the descriptive Phenomenological method, faithfulness is further enhanced when the researcher takes on a basic stance while making psychological reflections from the participants' descriptions. The description acts as the entry point to the participant's world. And the researcher places herself in the participant's world in order to understand the other's experiences. The researcher is obliged to critically go through the description and this requires slowing down to dwell upon the details in the description. The researcher pays attention to things that might appear not of much significance to the participant. These are magnified or amplified and any slightest detail becomes significant. The researcher suspends any belief and employs intense interest in what is provided in the description, focusing attention from participant's facts to their meanings. This helps the researcher to attend to the precise sense of the others experience (Giorgi, 1985, pp. 174-177).

Despite challenges, the practice of the Phenomenological reduction has helped in ensuring spontaneous flow of participant's narratives. It permits the participant to tell their story the way they wish with minimal interruption, and enhances scientific rigour in data analysis, because all the data is explored in detail and with a conscious resistance to biases. The researcher uses mental acts that help to set the mind free from the propensity of engaging preconceptions while exploring the other's experience. This is necessary in order to allow things to manifest in their original givenness (Mortari, 2008). The fundamental mental act in the Phenomenological method is paying careful and open attention, which refers to the ability to capture faithfully the other's experience as it discloses itself. Open attention is like some form of hearing and unlike seeing; hearing necessitates the mind to presume a passive position that permits the others experience to unveil (Mortari, 2008).

Other critical mental acts include being-not-in-search and emptying the mind. Being-not-in-search involves avoiding any form of control upon the coming-into-presence of the other which presupposes an attitude of waiting (Mortari, 2008). The researcher must allow to be driven by the way the other's lived experience unveils to facilitate self-revelation (Heidegger, 1966). Emptying the mind refers to keeping away from the presuppositions that are instilled in the researcher's mind as well as his or her

beliefs and wishes which may hinder capturing things as they appear in consciousness. Through this act of emptying, the researcher maintains her or his thinking open to capture the critical characteristics of the phenomenon (Mortari, 2008).

The Phenomenological attitude has its own limitations. It is a reflective attitude that the researcher has to keep on consciously exercising throughout the research process because it cannot be developed at once. The practice of Phenomenological reduction is continuous and the researcher has to exercise it throughout the research process (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Moustakas, 1994). Much as this is a limitation, it can also be considered as strength. According to the researcher's experience using the method, the practice of Phenomenological reduction makes the researcher more vigilant in order to apply the method appropriately. It calls for allocating enough time to all aspects of the research process. For instance, the researcher spent many months listening and re-listening to the individual narratives, which required exercising extreme patience. Descriptive psychological Phenomenological analysis is labor intensive and the researcher has spent considerable time on this process.

CONCLUSIONS The descriptive Phenomenological method has scientific rigour and it enhances the role of consciousness, intentionality and reflectivity in understanding an experiential phenomenon like Deliberate Self-Harm. The method provides adequate cultural sensitivity and amplifies the role of context in explicating experienced reality. Verbatim transcription is problematic in cross-cultural research where the interview is conducted in local language that is not used to communicate to the scientific world. To apply the method, it is important that the researcher is well conversant with the method and culture of the participants to successfully carry out the research. The method should be used in studying DSH in other cultural settings in Africa to enhance understanding the cultural meanings of such phenomenon and thereby to enhance the planning and developing of cultural sensitive suicide preventive and treatment strategies.

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