



Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Chronicles of Untold Reality: Mother's Mental Imbalance and Prejudice of Relations in an African Society

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Abstract

Mental health remains a concealed subject in African society, veiled by taboo and prejudice. Families coping with the burden of mental imbalance often endure social ostracization, entangled in a web of fear as hereditary concerns cast an ominous shadow on future generations. This narrative delves into the lived experience of a daughter whose mother's unexpected diagnosis of mental imbalance upends their lives, unveiling the harsh realities of societal perceptions and the resilience required to navigate the unknown. Drawing upon the methodology of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the research unearths the essence of the protagonist's experience and how they attribute meaning to their existence. This phenomenological approach allows for a deeper exploration of the emotional turmoil faced by the family at the onset of the mother's sickness and how they cope with the profound challenges that follow. As the story unfolds, the protagonist's mother, an accomplished school principal and district education director, grapples with memory loss and impulsive behavior, leading to vulnerability and victimization. The emotional upheaval faced by the family is captured vividly, as they navigate the complexities of their mother's deteriorating mental health. The search for a cure becomes an arduous battle, involving medical institutions, alternative treatments, and unwavering familial support. In the face of prejudice and stigmatization surrounding mental illness, the family's resilience shines through, uniting them in their pursuit of understanding and compassion. The narrative also explores the protagonist's internal struggle with faith and their quest for solace amidst the challenges posed by their mother's condition. Through this narrative and the application of IPA, the profound impact of mental health on individuals and families within African society is revealed. The research sheds light on the urgent need for a more compassionate societal response, breaking down barriers of prejudice, and fostering empathy and support for those facing mental health challenges. The combination of lived experiences and interpretive analysis brings to the fore the unspoken pain and unresolved questions endured by the protagonist, her mother, and their family. The hope of the protagonist lies in envisioning a future where understanding and dignity prevail, empowering individuals to walk their journeys with compassion and empathy.

Keywords: Interpretative Phenomenological; Untold Reality; Mental Imbalance

Introduction

In the depths of African society, mental health remains a hidden subject, shrouded in taboo and prejudice. Families

grappling with the burden of mental imbalance often endure social ostracization and are entangled in a web of fear, as hereditary concerns cast a dark shadow on the prospect of future generations. The anguish and trauma that ensue when

a mother is unexpectedly diagnosed with mental imbalance are profound and uncharted, revealing the harsh realities of societal perceptions and the resilience required to navigate through the unknown. This has remained my untold story for many years, which I have now realized must be shared.

A lived experience is more than a mere occurrence; its impact and enduring significance stem from the act of experiencing it [1]. This hermeneutic understanding of lived experience underscores the central role of the meaning attributed to the encounter. A comprehensive account of lived experience cannot be limited to a mere description; it must encompass an interpretation that holds personal significance. According to Ricoeur [2], a person's life story comprises two essential dimensions that contribute to its progression and direction: (1) a chronological sequence of episodes and (2) the construction of meaningful connections among scattered events within the phenomena.

The lived experience of being a child of a woman categorized as being mentally imbalanced, and our quest to get her cured, has been intertwined with prejudice we experienced in an African society where such conditions are often attributed to curses, witchcraft, or ancestral yokes. This experience must be shared to help society understand the frustrations faced by individuals going through such challenges and to foster empathetic responses from society. By doing so, mentally challenged individuals and their relatives can receive the much-needed emotional and social support to cope with the situation effectively.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to shed light on the hidden and often disregarded subject of mental health in African societies. Specifically, the study aims to explore the experiences of families grappling with mental imbalance, the impact on individuals' lives, and the challenges faced when a mother is unexpectedly diagnosed with a mental health condition. By delving into this untold reality, the research seeks to raise awareness about the stigmatization of mental health issues, the lack of understanding and support, and the need for enhanced compassion and advocacy in addressing mental health in African communities.

Significance

This study holds profound significance as it addresses a critical and understudied aspect of mental health in the context of African society. The research seeks to highlight the prevailing societal prejudices and taboos surrounding mental health, which often result in individuals and families enduring isolation and discrimination. By revealing the

emotional turmoil faced by the protagonist and her family, the study aims to bring attention to the urgent need for increased mental health awareness, support, and destigmatization within African communities.

Furthermore, the significance of this research lies in its potential to foster a more empathetic and inclusive understanding of mental health challenges. By sharing the untold reality of the protagonist's mother, the study hopes to evoke a deeper sense of compassion and solidarity, encouraging a shift in societal attitudes towards mental health. Ultimately, the research endeavors to spark conversations, advocate for change, and inspire further research and intervention efforts to improve the mental well-being of individuals and families in African societies.

Methodology

In this research, I will employ Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore and understand my lived experience of my mother's mental health imbalance and the prejudice encountered within an African society. Emerging from the realm of philosophy, Interpretative phenomenological Analysis offers a distinctive avenue to delve into the firsthand experiences of individuals. Undoubtedly, this approach provides a means to reveal phenomena through the lens of participants' interpretations and the significance they attach to their own existence [3]. As the primary participant and narrator of my own story, I will use the first-person language to provide a deeply personal and authentic account of the impact of mental imbalance on my life and relationships. Through this qualitative approach, I aim to uncover the untold realities surrounding mental health in an African societal context and advocate for greater empathy and awareness.

The primary purpose of employing interpretive phenomenology as a research method in my study is to uncover and disclose the phenomenon of my lived experience during my mother's mental health imbalance. Through this approach, the goal is to delve into the layers of forgetfulness or hiddenness that may exist in my ordinary, everyday existence [3], and bring to light the deeper meanings and interpretations attached to my journey. By exploring my subjective perspectives and emotions, interpretive phenomenology seeks to reveal the profound essence of my experiences, transcending the surface level and providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of my mother's mental health imbalance on my life and relationships [3]. This method allows me to shed light on the untold realities and challenges faced within the context of an African society, offering a nuanced exploration of the complexities and significance of this deeply personal journey.

Participant Selection

Being the central participant, I will be the focus of this research. My selection is based on my unique connection as a family member who has experienced and navigated through my mother's mental health journey. My willingness to openly share my story and perspectives will guide the research process.

Data Collection

In-depth, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with me to capture the intricacies of my lived experience. The interviews will be designed to encourage open and reflective discussions about my memories, emotions, thoughts, and coping mechanisms related to my mother's mental health imbalance and the societal prejudice encountered. To maintain the credibility of the data, the interviews will be audio-recorded, and field notes will be taken to document contextual observations.

Issues of Bias and Mitigation

As the narrator of my own story, I acknowledge the potential for biases that may influence the research process and findings. Several measures will be implemented to mitigate these biases:

Reflexivity: Throughout the research process, I will engage in self-reflection and self-awareness to recognize and acknowledge my own biases and preconceptions. I will be honest with myself about my emotions, beliefs, and attitudes concerning my mother's mental health journey and how they may influence the data collection and analysis.

Bracketing: I will employ bracketing during data collection and analysis, a process of temporarily setting aside my preconceptions and personal beliefs to avoid imposing them on the data. Husserl, the influential German philosopher and the founding figure of contemporary phenomenology, proposed that by employing bracketing presuppositions or epoche, the essence of things and experiences would emerge directly from themselves, as expressed by the phrase "zu den Sachen selbst" (Mapp, 2008; Moran, 2000; Van Manen, 2014, [3]. This practice will enable me to approach the research with a fresh and open mind.

Member-Checking: I will engage in member-checking, where I will share the preliminary findings with trusted individuals, such as family members or close friends, who are familiar with my experiences. Their input will help validate the accuracy and authenticity of the analysis, reducing potential researcher bias.

Peer Debriefing: I will engage in peer debriefing with colleagues or researchers experienced in IPA to discuss and review my interpretations. This external perspective will add

rigor and critical scrutiny to the research process.

Transparency: I will be transparent about my methods, data analysis, and interpretations, providing a clear account of my research journey to ensure the findings' trustworthiness.

By employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of my lived experience, this research will provide an intimate and authentic understanding of the untold reality of families dealing with mental imbalance and prejudice in an African society. The adoption of measures to mitigate bias will enhance the credibility and validity of the research findings, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the impact of mental health challenges within this cultural context. Through my narrative, this study seeks to foster empathy, awareness, and support for individuals and families facing similar struggles.

The Strong, Achieving Mother

A remarkable woman of strength and accomplishment, my mother's illustrious career as a school principal and district education director spanned over four decades. Driven by an insatiable desire for knowledge, she embarked on further studies, but an alarming pattern of impulsive spending and perpetual financial appeals began to surface. Soon, it became evident that she was grappling with memory loss, an opportunity that some colleagues shamelessly exploited, leaving her vulnerable and victimized. Instances of her losing herself, coupled with the callous treatment she endured, painted a grim picture of her ordeal. Though she smiled upon our visits, the depths of her struggles were concealed, and her long-cherished dreams of academic pursuit and career advancement were cruelly curtailed by the onset of her mental health battle.

The Emotional Turmoil at the Onset of My Mother's Sickness

The emotional turmoil at the onset of my mother's sickness was a devastating tempest of emotions, engulfing me in a sea of uncertainty and heartache. Little did I know that her seemingly innocent forgetfulness and uncharacteristic actions were the harbingers of a storm that would soon descend upon our lives. It was disheartening to witness the strong and accomplished woman my mother had always been reduced to a state of helplessness and confusion. How could this have happened? Who could have inflicted such suffering upon my beloved mother? I found myself questioning, even lamenting, God's role in allowing this to befall Mary, for that was my mother's name, similar to the mother of Jesus in the biblical account of Matthew 1:18-25 [4].

As I entered her room at the teacher training school where she resided, there she lay, disoriented yet smiling,

with a glimmer of confusion in her eyes. My heart sank as I witnessed my mother, the very essence of strength and capability, slipping away before my eyes.

In the days that followed, we grappled with the harsh reality of her deteriorating mental health. Simple tasks became insurmountable challenges for her, and her memory began to fail her, causing her to forget even the most mundane details of our lives. The gravity of the situation escalated when she started engaging in unsafe behaviors, like turning on the gas without placing anything on it or misplacing plastic items on the stove. The anger and helplessness I felt were overwhelming, knowing that my caring and generous mother was now vulnerable and susceptible to exploitation.

As her condition worsened, the toll on our family's emotions became almost unbearable. We tried our best to care for her and provide support, but the challenges seemed insurmountable. The fear of losing her forever haunted us, especially when she wandered off and got lost, leaving us frantically searching for her. In the midst of this emotional turmoil, I found myself wrestling with profound questions about the meaning of it all. Why would such a fate befall my mother, who had devoted her life to helping others and being a pillar of strength for us? The question of why a loving and just God would allow such suffering to afflict someone so dear to our hearts remained unanswered.

The Battle for a Cure and the Unyielding Unknown

Driven by profound love and appreciation for the sacrifices she made while raising four children in a polygamous household, my siblings and I united in a quest for her recovery. Rotating her between our homes, we endeavored to surround her with love and comfort. Despite our unwavering efforts, medical professionals were bewildered by her condition, and diagnostic tests offered no conclusive answers. She underwent an arduous two-year psychiatric medication regime to no avail. We traversed between hospitals, from the prestigious Korle-Bu teaching hospital to the largest psychiatric facility, the Accra Psychiatric Hospital, exploring every avenue for a remedy. Desperation led us to seek alternative treatments, including herbal remedies and faith-based interventions, only to face crushing disappointment. A tragic moment unfolded when she wandered away, robbed of her voice and reasoning, leaving us in a relentless pursuit to find her. A week of excruciating uncertainty was quelled when we received the call that she had been found. With renewed hope, we resumed psychiatric and psychological interventions, yet her smile remained her only communication. Eventually, our beloved mother passed, leaving us grappling with the enigma of her

illness, unanswered questions, and an overwhelming sense of powerlessness, torn by the inability to alleviate her pain.

The Prejudice Endured as a Daughter of a Mentally Challenged Mother

During her affliction, the profound heartache extended beyond her suffering to the painful reality of societal prejudice. Averting gazes and disdainful glances greeted my mother's smile, and people would withdraw in avoidance. My heart ached for her, a woman who had always radiated kindness and compassion throughout her life, undeserving of the mistreatment she endured. Her mental imbalance was not a choice she made, and I wondered if she grasped the unkindness surrounding her. In the midst of my distress, my personal concerns were secondary, for my siblings and I were already married. However, in the African context, marriage extends beyond two individuals, involving the union of families, and mental illness is a barrier to forming these alliances. Though we were spared this burden, the stigma of her condition persisted, shaping our journey as a family.

Navigating the Depths of Despair

As my mother's mental illness began to affect her physical well-being, all my hopes of her recovery seemed to fade away. Even my eldest brother, known for his positive vocabulary as a pastor, gradually accepted the grim reality that our mother might not get better. As the possibility of her succumbing to the illness loomed larger, my Christian faith was shaken, and I found myself questioning the existence of God. I struggled to understand how a loving and caring divine figure could allow my mother, the mother of his/her child, to endure such humiliation and pain for an extended period and eventually take her life. The disappointment in God was profound, and I questioned whether I could ever find solace or smile again. Despite grappling with this disappointment, I remained a Christian, and eventually, my journey towards reconciliation with God commenced. The exact moment of recovery from my disappointment remains unclear, but I found myself once again seeking comfort in worship. The process was not easy, and there were moments when I thought I might never experience genuine happiness again.

Coping and Living with Family Support

Throughout the challenging journey of my mother's mental illness, our family's strong support and resilience played a pivotal role in helping us cope with the emotional turmoil. My mother, a remarkable woman of strength and accomplishment, had a successful career as a school principal and district education director. Her pursuit of

knowledge through further studies was marred by the emergence of memory loss and impulsive spending, exposing her vulnerability to exploitation. As her mental health deteriorated, our family faced a whirlwind of emotions. Witnessing her transformation from a pillar of strength to a state of helplessness and confusion was heart-wrenching. We grappled with the uncertainty and questioned why such suffering would befall someone as caring and generous as my mother.

During this time, family support became our anchor. We rallied together to provide care and comfort, rotating her between our homes to surround her with love. However, the challenges seemed insurmountable as her condition worsened, and she engaged in unsafe behaviors. Despite the hardships, our bond as a family grew stronger, and we united in a determined quest for her recovery. We sought medical assistance from various institutions, exploring every avenue for a remedy. Even when traditional treatments and interventions failed, our love and hope endured.

One of the most painful aspects was witnessing the societal prejudice my mother faced due to her mental illness. The disdainful glances and avoidance from others weighed heavily on us. We realized the importance of breaking the barriers of prejudice and promoting empathy and understanding in society. The journey was a rollercoaster of emotions, and my Christian faith was severely tested. I questioned the existence of God, grappling with the pain and suffering my mother endured. Yet, despite my disappointment, I clung to my faith, finding solace in worship once again. The path towards reconciliation with God was not easy, but it provided a glimmer of hope amid the darkness.

Through the years, our experiences remain etched in our memories, a tapestry of unspoken pain and unresolved questions. Yet, we envision a future where advancements in mental health research bridge the gap between patients and their loved ones. Our hope is for a more compassionate society that understands and supports families navigating mental health challenges with dignity and empathy. The journey has been difficult, but the strength we found in each other, and our unwavering support has carried us through. As we continue to navigate life's uncertainties, we hold onto hope, cherishing the memories of our strong, achieving mother and aiming to pave the way for a more compassionate and understanding world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the chronicles of my mother's mental imbalance and the prejudice endured in an African society have been a journey filled with emotional turmoil, challenges,

and resilience. My mother's strength and achievements, once pillars of our family, were overshadowed by the devastating impact of her mental health battle. As her illness progressed, our family faced the heartache of witnessing her decline, grappling with questions of faith and the meaning of her suffering. Throughout this difficult journey, the unwavering support of our family proved to be our guiding light. Together, we navigated the depths of despair, seeking medical solutions, and exploring alternative treatments in a desperate quest for her recovery. However, despite our efforts, we were confronted with the unyielding unknown of her illness, leaving us feeling powerless in the face of her pain.

The prejudice endured by my mother, a woman who had always radiated kindness and compassion, added another layer of heartache to our journey. As a family, we experienced societal stigmatization and disdainful glances, highlighting the need for a more compassionate and understanding society. Amidst the emotional whirlwind, my Christian faith was challenged, and I grappled with the existence of God in the face of such suffering. Yet, I found hope in my faith, seeking reconciliation and solace through worship, even in moments of profound disappointment.

The experiences shared in this narrative remain etched in our memories, an emotional tapestry of unspoken pain and unresolved questions. Through our untold reality, I envision a future where advancements in mental health research bridge the gap between patients and their loved ones, fostering empathy and understanding. As I move forward, I hold on to the strength we found in each other, cherishing the memories of my strong, achieving mother. The journey has been difficult, but it has also revealed the resilience of the human spirit. I aspire to advocate for a society that breaks the barriers of prejudice, offering support and compassion to families navigating mental health challenges with dignity and empathy.

In sharing this untold reality, I hope to inspire a more compassionate world, where the stigmatization of mental imbalance gives way to a society that values understanding and support for those facing such challenges. With every step forward, I carry the enduring legacy of my mother's strength, resilience, and the deep love that has bound our family together through the storm.

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