

The use of Husserl's phenomenology in nursing research: A discussion paper

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Abstract

Aims: To discuss how Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, as a philosophy and approach, has been used and reported in researching the experiences of others, using the topic of foreign-trained nurses.

Design: Discussion paper.

Data sources: A systematic search of MEDLINE (PubMed), CINAHL, SCOPUS, British Nursing Database and PsycInfo was carried out in December 2021. The inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed phenomenological research articles, grounded by Husserl's philosophy, conducted among foreign-trained nurses and published in English from 2000 to 2021.

Findings: Two main themes were the outcome of critically reviewing relevant selected literature, '*referring to the original philosophy is not enough*' and '*phenomenological findings need to be phenomenological*'. These findings confirm some arguments about nurse researchers' discrepant use of phenomenology in their studies, including the proper application of phenomenological notions on the ground.

Implication for Nursing: Nurse researchers need to clearly distinguish between phenomenology and other qualitative research approaches and consider the uniqueness of philosophical underpinnings that are essential in Husserl's phenomenology, which also need to be clearly applied and reflected in their studies.

Conclusion: There are continually existing discrepancies and variations in using phenomenology by nurse researchers. These variations were uniquely evident when nurse researchers could not provide enough philosophical grounds and assumptions to their studies and underestimated the need to keep up with the various applications of Husserl's phenomenological notions, including the proper practice of phenomenological attitude. Therefore, it is recommended that nurse researchers should opt for different, less complex qualitative approaches if they do not adequately prepare and understand what constitutes phenomenology and the particulars of Husserl's philosophy.

No Patient or Public Contribution: Due to the nature of this discussion paper addressing philosophical and methodological aspects using examples from the literature, no direct patient or public contribution was required.

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KEYWORDS

husserl, phenomenology, philosophy, qualitative approaches, research methods

1 | INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology is a philosophy that has its origins in the work of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), who is well known as the founder of phenomenology (Cohen, 1987; Spiegelberg, 1994). It is also a human science research approach that considers human experiences as common ground (Dowling, 2007; van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology is also about how researchers capture and understand the experiences of others by seeking to understand the essence that forms the phenomenon of interest (Polit & Beck, 2018). The criticality of philosophical underpinnings in phenomenology distinguishes it from other qualitative research approaches (Cohen, 1987; Giorgi, 2008). Consequently, doing phenomenological research requires researchers to keep up with its critical notions and philosophical principles throughout the research process, which allows things, as they appear, 'to speak for themselves' (Lewis & Staehler, 2010).

Phenomenology is classified based on its various methods and approaches. This classification is known as *schools of phenomenology*, which includes (1) Husserl's descriptive or eidetic phenomenology, (2) Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology and (3) the Dutch hermeneutical phenomenology that has a descriptive and interpretive basis as in the example of van Manen (1990) (Cohen et al., 2000). Additionally, other forms of the original approach of phenomenology emerged in modern times, such as heuristic phenomenology (Moustakas, 1990) and Smith et al.'s (2009) interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Consequently, this changing or developing nature of the philosophical stands of phenomenology by different philosophers and sometimes within individual philosophers has made it more difficult to follow and apply properly, making it a challenging option for researchers who need to select, justify and apply an appropriate approach from the wide variety of available approaches of phenomenology. (Caelli, 2000; Cohen, 1987). Although various philosophers developed phenomenology over multiple phases, Husserl and Heidegger remain the leading figures in all-time phenomenology. This ranking had been introduced by other contributors to phenomenology, who most often refer to the original work of Husserl and Heidegger (Cohen & Omery, 1994). Nevertheless, Husserl is the core icon of the whole phenomenological movement (Cohen, 1987), where Heidegger, for some time, served as an assistant to him before he created his philosophy of interpretive phenomenology (Spiegelberg, 1994).

2 | BACKGROUND

Phenomenology remains popular in nursing science and practice since its first introduction in nursing during the 1970s (Thomas, 2005; Zahavi & Martiny, 2019), in which the diversity of

Impact

What problem did the study address?

Phenomenology remains popular in nursing. However, it can confuse nurse researchers and may result in an improper understanding of its core concepts. The use of phenomenology in nursing has been criticized over the years with nurse researchers being accused of conducting phenomenological research inconsistent with the original philosophy.

What were the main findings?

Using phenomenology by nurse researchers is various and includes some discrepancies. This variation is caused by not complying with essential philosophical grounds and underestimating proper applications of Husserl's phenomenological notions.

Where and on whom will the research have impact?

Outcomes of this paper illustrate examples of proper and improper uses of Husserl's phenomenology in nursing research, including critical considerations, which can guide nurse researchers aiming to conduct descriptive phenomenological research. Additionally, nurse lecturers can utilize this paper to show and emphasize the importance of philosophical grounds in phenomenology.

nursing specialities made it popular among nurse researchers who contributed to an increased number of nursing phenomenological research (Beck, 1994). However, phenomenology can be confusing and result in an improper understanding of its core concepts, leading to inappropriately conducted research studies. Some of these confusing aspects include the fact that phenomenology can be used as a philosophy and as a research method; the diverse philosophies of phenomenology within various paradigms, including their developing nature, interpretation and use; as well as the different existing schools of phenomenology. This exposes nurse researchers to further challenges in conducting phenomenological research (Dowling, 2007). In addition, the language of phenomenological notions caused further difficulty, resulting in a lack of understanding (Earle, 2010; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). According to Giorgi (2000), the confusion around using phenomenology in nursing research stems from multiple aspects, including the nurses' improper demonstration of how they understand phenomenology and the confusion as to which school of phenomenology to use. Moreover, this confusion exacerbated the nurses' struggle to correctly choose and apply a suitable phenomenology form (Porter, 2008).

The use of phenomenology in nursing has been criticized by researchers such as Paley (1997, 1998, 2005, 2017), who called the phenomenology used by nurse researchers as a 'philosophy of nurse-phenomenology'. This was to showcase nurse researchers' departure from the original philosophies of Husserl and Heidegger (Zahavi & Martiny, 2019). Other scholars, such as Michael Crotty (1996), also criticized phenomenology in nursing. Crotty called the phenomenology conducted by nurses, especially in North America, the 'new phenomenology'. According to Crotty, the new phenomenology incorporates new meanings to some of the original terms and concepts of traditional phenomenology, including experience, phenomenon, reduction and bracketing, while using an epistemological stance that contradicts the traditional phenomenology. Nevertheless, nurse researchers' inability to show proper understanding of the philosophy behind phenomenology caused and exacerbated this critique (Earle, 2010; Johnson, 2000).

The literature includes many examples of the proper and improper use of phenomenology in nursing. However, Giorgi (2000) states that one must acknowledge that the inappropriate application of phenomenology in some nursing research resulted from nurse researchers adopting scientific, not philosophical, phenomenology. Nevertheless, adopting proper scientific steps would ensure enhanced phenomenological work could be carried out in nursing, as the work does not have to be philosophical. Due to ongoing arguments regarding the confusion of understanding and applying phenomenology correctly as well as the debated use of phenomenology in nursing research, this discussion paper was prepared based on a critical review of nursing phenomenological studies grounded by Husserl's philosophy. Specifically, narrowing the scope of this discussion paper to Husserl's descriptive phenomenology ensured a homogeneous application of the critical review criteria among selected studies.

The use of descriptive phenomenological methods in Nursing research revolves around nurses' and student nurses' experiences in addition to patient's experiences (Beck, 2013). Moreover, undertaking descriptive phenomenological studies, nurse researchers across the globe heavily employed the phenomenological methods developed by the Duquesne School of Phenomenology, which includes the methods of van Kaam (1966), Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1985). The Duquesne school of phenomenology, which is consistent with Husserl's philosophy of descriptive phenomenology, contributed to making Husserl's descriptive phenomenology popular in Nursing due to the popularity of the phenomenological methods developed by its members (Cohen et al., 2000).

Additionally, nurse researchers applied phenomenology not only to study patients or clients in the general public but to study themselves and their nursing colleagues and students, making the phenomenon of nurses studying lived experiences of other nurses very popular in postgraduate nursing programs (De Chesnay, 2014). Therefore, the topic of the lived experiences of foreign-trained nurses was chosen to help search and select phenomenological studies from the literature. Specifically, this topic has been selected due to the availability of a wide range of studies conducted on

foreign-trained nurses that explored, described or interpreted their lived experiences using phenomenological approaches focusing on their migration journeys that equipped them with unique experiences explored by phenomenological studies (Pung & Goh, 2017). Consequently, selecting one topic from nursing research for this discussion paper provided consistency that enhanced how the use of Husserl's phenomenology was assessed and discussed. Therefore, this discussion paper aims to critically review and discuss selected descriptive phenomenological studies and analyse the reference to and uses of Husserl's philosophy of phenomenology with a philosophical and methodological focus. In contrast, this discussion paper does not focus on the substantive findings about foreign-trained nurses or the quality of included studies.

3 | METHODS

The design of this discussion paper was guided by the following question: How has Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, as a philosophy and approach, been used and reported in researching the experiences of foreign-trained nurses? Consequently, this discussion paper was based on a critical review of relevant literature. The paper was designed by comprehensively exploring the available literature and critically evaluating it, focusing on methodological and philosophical applications (Grant & Booth, 2009). Additionally, the review which guided this discussion paper sought to critically review and discuss two aspects of the selected studies: the application of basic phenomenological tenets of Husserl's philosophy and the presentation of phenomenological findings. Furthermore, studies considered were those where the primary research approach was descriptive phenomenological, clearly underpinned by Husserl's philosophy, included foreign-trained nurses as participants, and had been conducted by at least one nurse researcher. To ensure sufficient studies were chosen from the overall literature, the review included peer-reviewed journal articles reported in English from 2000 to 2021. The search period was selected to reflect the debate on using phenomenology in nursing that started in the mid to late nineties, which resulted from increasing interest in using phenomenology in nursing research (Todres & Wheeler, 2001).

Once no similar work had been identified in the literature, multiple search terms were created and tested. This resulted in final search terms that were run in December 2021 using MEDLINE (PubMed), CINAHL, SCOPUS, British Nursing Database (ProQuest) and PsycInfo. The final search terms were as follows: '(foreign OR international OR expatriate OR internationally OR overseas OR immigrant) AND (phenomenology OR phenomenological) AND (nurse OR nurses OR nursing)'. The terms were searched according to the requirements of each database in the title and abstract sections. It was decided not to include the keywords 'experience' and 'descriptive' in the search terms to see how researchers employed phenomenology without imposing a prior link between phenomenology and the study of the experiences of others and between descriptive phenomenology and Husserl. Consequently, data were extracted

from each study according to the aims that grounded this paper, focusing on extracting content that demonstrated how the authors employed Husserl's descriptive phenomenology throughout their studies. Moreover, a deductive thematic analysis of extracted data was carried out. The analysis focused on how basic phenomenological notions of Husserl's descriptive phenomenology were used and reported in each study, including the presentation of phenomenological findings.

4 | FINDINGS

The search of databases revealed a total of 554 potential articles. The identified articles in each database were as follows: 139 in PubMed, 152 in CINAHL, 99 in SCOPUS, 99 in British Nursing Database and 65 in PsycInfo. Moreover, another nine articles were identified through manual reference checking, resulting in 563 articles. After removing 360 duplicates and another 130 articles at the title screening level, a total of 73 articles were screened at the abstract level. Consequently, 33 articles were reviewed at the full-text level, which resulted in 18 articles that used phenomenology as the primary research approach. In specific, different schools of phenomenology were identified as the primary methodology by the 18 studies reviewed at the full-text level. However, only 10 studies referred to phenomenological philosophies as a ground for design and conduct, including six that referenced Husserl's philosophy. Consequently, these six studies qualified for in-depth critical analysis, which resulted in themes presented in Table 1. Additionally, a summary of the general characteristics of the six studies included is illustrated in Appendix S1.

4.1 | Referring to the original philosophy is not enough

All included studies in the critical analysis referenced Husserl's philosophy of phenomenology as an underpinning ground for the research. However, while some studies provided a detailed account of the referenced philosophy, including its application in their studies

TABLE 1 The thematic outcome of using Husserl's phenomenology in the included studies

Theme	Sub-theme
1. Referring to the original philosophy is not enough	1.1. Subjective experiences of participants or the wider phenomenon? 1.2. Essence of experiences or the phenomenon itself? 1.3. The phenomenological reduction (bracketing)—applying or implying?
2. Phenomenological findings need to be phenomenological	

(Abudari et al., 2016; Halligan, 2006), other studies only mentioned the philosophy without providing clear justification for its use or how it was applied throughout the study (Smith et al., 2011). Equally, referring to Husserl's philosophy showed some inconsistency in using its basic notions across studies.

The authors of the reviewed studies provided various justifications for selecting phenomenology in general, and Husserl's phenomenology in particular, for conducting their studies. For example, one study linked the selection of Husserl's descriptive phenomenology with the purpose of the study; they stated, 'Husserlian phenomenology allows the researchers to explore and describe the structure of consciences as experienced from the first-person point of view.' (Pogoy & Cutamora, 2021, p. 187). Other studies explained why the particular type of phenomenology was appropriate to the focus of their studies (Halligan, 2006; Smith et al., 2011). On the other hand, other authors only provided definitions of the selected type of phenomenology without making clear justifications for their selection (Njie-Mokonya, 2016), or only justified a phenomenological study in general but not Husserl's phenomenology. For instance, one study stated, 'A qualitative design was adopted for this study using Husserl's phenomenology philosophy. It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a detailed critique of this approach.' (Alexis & Shillingford, 2012).

4.1.1 | Subjective experiences of participants or the wider phenomenon?

All studies were clear in using phenomenology for studying experiences or lived experiences of others. However, focusing on studying lived experiences varied from exploring the experience (Abudari et al., 2016; Alexis & Shillingford, 2012; Pogoy & Cutamora, 2021; Smith et al., 2011) or examining the experience (Njie-Mokonya, 2016). Other authors provided another form of studying the experience, for example, 'to explicate the essence of the experience' (Halligan, 2006, p. 1566). On the contrary, some reviewed studies used phenomenology beyond studying the experience; for example, in addition to studying the experience, one study aimed to describe the perception of participant nurses in contributing to patient care experience (Njie-Mokonya, 2016). Nevertheless, the authors focused their studies on subjective experiences of participants rather than on the wider phenomenon of interest by describing essences relevant to participants' experiences (Halligan, 2006; Pogoy & Cutamora, 2021; Smith et al., 2011) or by addressing how phenomenology is about the phenomenon of interest but on the other hand focused their studies on subjective experiences of participants (Alexis & Shillingford, 2012).

4.1.2 | Essence of experiences or the phenomenon itself?

The term essence was widely used in the included studies. For example, in six descriptive phenomenological studies, only

one study did not mention or address the notion of essence (Alexis & Shillingford, 2012). On the other side, three studies highlighted the term essence in the data analysis section, for instance, creating a structural description of essences and preparing a composite description of the essences of the experiences from data (Abudari et al., 2016; Njie-Mokonya, 2016; Smith et al., 2011;). Equally, other studies illustrated the role of explaining and describing the essence in understanding the experience (Halligan, 2006; Pogoy & Cutamora, 2021). However, none of the studies applied the term essence concerning the phenomenon of interest and mainly discussed it as what constitutes participants' experiences.

4.1.3 | The phenomenological reduction (bracketing)—Applying or implying?

All studies addressed the concept of bracketing in some form. Some authors clearly stated that it is a basic tenet of descriptive phenomenology and must be carefully considered (Abudari et al., 2016; Alexis & Shillingford, 2012; Halligan, 2006;) and others only mentioned the term without reference to the philosophy of phenomenology (Njie-Mokonya, 2016; Pogoy & Cutamora, 2021; Smith et al., 2011). Exercising bracketing was varied across the studies. Some authors defined the term and illustrated how they applied it throughout the study. For example, one study stated, '*as I had extensive experience of caring for patients throughout the Middle East, I began by writing down personal and theoretical assumptions regarding my experiences. Periodically, these notes were reviewed to ensure that the objectivity of the participants' meanings of their experience was maintained as much as possible.*' (Halligan, 2006, p. 1567).

Other authors pointed out how bracketing helped minimize bias during the data collection process, in which they documented their prior knowledge and experience before interviewing participants (Alexis & Shillingford, 2012; Njie-Mokonya, 2016). Moreover, bracketing was linked with limiting or suspending prior judgements and conceptions about the situation or phenomenon under study (Abudari et al., 2016; Alexis & Shillingford, 2012; Pogoy & Cutamora, 2021; Smith et al., 2011). Additionally, Smith et al. (2011) highlighted how the proper exercising of bracketing was arguable and challenging as no pure bracketing could be achieved. The steps taken to apply bracketing on the ground were explicitly illustrated in some studies (Alexis & Shillingford, 2012; Halligan, 2006), while others only stated that they applied bracketing; for example, two authors said, '*bracketing was performed before and during each interview as well as throughout data collection and analysis*' (Abudari et al., 2016, p. 602) and '*Prior to starting the interview, bracketing was done*' (Pogoy & Cutamora, 2021, p. 188). One study linked bracketing with achieving rigour (Abudari et al., 2016), and another stated that they postponed the full literature review until after analysing the data to comply with bracketing (Smith et al., 2011).

4.2 | Phenomenological findings need to be phenomenological

The studies utilized various data analysis frameworks and methods. Appendix S1 includes the data analysis methods employed by each study. In addition, most authors provided detailed data analysis steps concerning the method used. For example, in some studies, data analysis aimed to allocate meanings of the discussions and related experiences (Halligan, 2006), describing universal essences of experiences (Njie-Mokonya, 2016; Pogoy & Cutamora, 2021), describing experiences (Abudari et al., 2016) or describing the meaning and essences of experiences (Smith et al., 2011). Additionally, some authors provided justifications for the selected data analysis methods. For example, using Colaizzi's (1978) method was justified as the method permits simultaneous data collection and analysis activities, its flexible steps, including the role of participants to validate outcomes (Halligan, 2006), the method enhances the state of openness to collected data (Njie-Mokonya, 2016) and referring to the method as being consistent with Husserl's descriptive phenomenology which helps in describing lived experiences of participants (Pogoy & Cutamora, 2021).

Findings were presented in various ways, for example, with less focus on comprehensively presenting the phenomenon under study but by presenting findings that were not phenomenological or descriptive. For example, some authors named some of the generated themes as '*End-of-life care practices*' (Abudari et al., 2016, p. 603), '*Patient Care During COVID-19*' (Pogoy & Cutamora, 2021, p. 190) or '*Working with patients*' (Smith et al., 2011, p. 291). Those authors illustrated absent to a minimum influence of Husserl's philosophy in presenting their findings. In contrast, other authors showed how Husserl's philosophy impacted the presentation of their findings.

Studies that provided non-phenomenological and only flat statement themes were conflicting with their aims and a core concept of Husserl's philosophy, which is '*going to things themselves, so they speak for themselves*'. For example, those studies had the following phenomenological aims: '*to explicate the essence of the experience of caring*' (Halligan, 2006, p. 1566); '*to explore how a small group of NESB [non-English speaking background] OQNs [overseas qualified nurses] experienced the practice*' (Smith et al., 2011, p. 290); '*to examine IENs [internationally educated nurses] transition experiences*' (Njie-Mokonya, 2016, p. 3) or '*to explore non-Muslim nurses' lived experiences in caring*' (Abudari et al., 2016, p. 601). However, reading the findings of these studies implies that they are generic qualitative rather than phenomenological. In contrast, other authors provided more consistent and detailed findings with both the original aims of their studies as well as Husserl's school of phenomenology.

The authors of the studies presented their findings in different ways. Some authors focused equally on describing the generated themes and linking them with direct quotes from participants (Njie-Mokonya, 2016; Smith et al., 2011). Other authors focused on providing detailed descriptions of the generated themes, using less direct quotes from the data (Abudari et al., 2016). On the contrary,

other authors provided brief or shallow descriptions of the themes and focused on providing more participants' quotes (Pogoy & Cutamora, 2021). The inclusion of major themes and sub-themes was also various. Some studies included only main themes without highlighting any other sub-content with each primary theme presented (Abudari et al., 2016; Alexis & Shillingford, 2012), and one study illustrated that they chose to present only the major themes and some selected sub-themes due to the large amount of data collected (Halligan, 2006).

5 | DISCUSSION

Acknowledging and highlighting existing deficiencies in phenomenological practice shall enhance the quality of scientific phenomenological research (Giorgi, 2008). Therefore, this paper aimed to critically analyse and discuss the use of Husserl's phenomenology by nurse researchers in one selected research topic. Consequently, the review associated with this discussion paper revealed and emphasized the existing discrepancies in conducting phenomenological research studies by nurse researchers upholding Crotty (1996), Draucker (1999), Giorgi (2008), Norlyk and Harder (2010), Paley (1997) and Shorey and Ng's (2022) critiques of nurse researchers using phenomenology.

Specifically, the authors of the reviewed studies utilized Husserl's phenomenology in four distinct ways. First, some authors cited basic phenomenological notions that grounded their studies and further defined those notions with illustrations of how those notions were particularly applied in their studies. Second, some cited phenomenological notions only by providing definitions for such notions. Third, some authors only mentioned the phenomenological notions without further detailing the definition or use; fourthly, other authors simply highlighted the research methods used under the umbrella of 'phenomenology'. Nevertheless, undertaking phenomenological research demands researchers to consider and be familiar with the philosophical traditions of phenomenology, so they can articulate the epistemological and theoretical implications of the study (van Manen, 1990; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Equally, a basic set of descriptive phenomenological notions must be carefully considered and applied in the research, so the research can be called descriptive phenomenological research, including intentionality, reduction/bracketing/epoché, essence and intersubjectivity (Finlay, 2011; Koch, 1995; Moustakas, 1994).

Nurse researchers conducting phenomenological research, regardless of the approach, tend not to state the original philosophical ground of the utilized approach or how it impacted all steps of their studies (Draucker, 1999; Koch, 1995; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Norlyk & Harder, 2010), ignore addressing the specific type of phenomenology used (Lopez & Willis, 2004), or they do not justify the used phenomenological approach (Shorey & Ng, 2022). In the same way, the authors of reviewed studies referred to or cited Husserl's philosophy claiming their studies were phenomenological. However, they did not show how they made sense of the associated philosophical

notions of descriptive phenomenology in making their studies phenomenological, as it has been highlighted in the findings that referring to the philosophy of phenomenology is not enough.

Some of the authors disregard how they should have mutually existed with participants in collecting data about and structuring the phenomena addressed in the reviewed studies. This was noticed when the researchers could not explain their roles and perceptions of the involved phenomena. Specifically, understanding the experience of others begins with understanding our perception of that experience, which is characterized by the notion of *intersubjectivity* (Husserl, 2013). Consequently, the authors of the reviewed studies rarely explained their intersubjective accounts about the involved phenomena, participants or surrounding contexts, making their studies less phenomenological.

The researchers of the studies in this review conveyed the application of descriptive phenomenology and the outcomes of their research differently. Some of the studies did not offer a complete and transparent sense of the phenomenon under study. This challenging aspect of conducting phenomenological studies stemmed from the researchers' inability to communicate the study, their unclear role involved in the same said studies, and from focusing their efforts on the participants' subjective experiences rather than the overarching phenomenon of interest (Crotty, 1996; Thomas, 2005). Therefore, presenting phenomenological findings depends on how researchers understand the phenomenon, which affects how readers would understand it. The authors of the reviewed studies did not completely present phenomenological findings due to ignoring some of the associated meanings, feelings, emotions and responses of participants relevant to experiencing the phenomenon, creating narrative descriptions or summaries of subjective participants' accounts. Consequently, researchers need to consider returning to experience to collect and create comprehensive descriptions of what constitutes the phenomenon, not only summarizing what is provided by participants (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, phenomenological findings differ from other qualitative findings by allowing us to recreate the experience every time we read them (Giorgi, 1985). This issue was evident in the reviewed studies where most authors presented qualitative descriptions of collected subjective accounts, ignoring how things appeared, evolved and interacted, which resulted in non-phenomenological outcomes and complicated how they would be understood by others. Therefore, capturing the appearance of a phenomenon requires the notions of *intuition*, where every experience is about something, and *imaginative variation*, which is needed to grasp the structural essences of experience and make sense of the phenomenon. (Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994).

In the same way, Finlay (2009) argues that '*studies which focus on subjective experience without attending to the 'phenomenological attitude' and/or underpinning philosophical theory are probably best considered phenomenologically-inspired rather than phenomenology per se*' (p. 474). Moreover, focusing the presentation of findings around the participants' subjective experiences rather than the phenomenon of interest results in unclear presentation, description and interpretation of the phenomenon under study (Norlyk & Harder, 2010).

However, presenting and communicating phenomenological findings can be classified as the most challenging problem of phenomenology, according to Giorgi (1985), who also states the reasons for such a challenge which include: (1) the way phenomenological thinking is organized by focusing on the appearance of things instead of focusing on the natural tendency of researchers' consciousness of seeing things, (2) the evolving and changing nature of the phenomenological work, especially Husserl's work and (3) the rise of other phenomenologists who have developed other interpretations of phenomenology, where some were different from the original interpretations introduced by Husserl.

It is evident that the authors of the studies in this review carried out their work as a form of scientific inquiry, which aimed to study participants' subjective experiences with less focus on the philosophical aspects of Husserl's philosophy. This particular deficiency caused by misusing the philosophy of phenomenology is consistent with critics of Crotty (1996) and Paley (1997, 1998) and with other similar reviews by Draucker (1999), Giorgi (2008) and Norlyk and Harder (2010). Additionally, referring to Husserl's philosophy of phenomenology without providing enough application of the same philosophy affected how the reviewed studies articulated and communicated what they were supposed to do and why. For example, a review by Shorey and Ng (2022) found that some studies that claimed to be descriptive phenomenological utilized other underpinning theoretical frameworks irrelevant to descriptive phenomenology or ended up employing non-descriptive phenomenological data analysis approaches such as IPA.

Beyond the clarifications of why phenomenology is difficult to be communicated and understood, Giorgi (1985) also articulates how it is normal for phenomenology as a philosophy to be understood differently from its original philosophers. This example includes Psychologists such as Colaizzi (1978), Smith et al. (2009) and van Kaam (1966), Nurses such as Benner (1984, 1994), Munhall (2012) and Watson (1979), or Pedagogists such as van Manen (1990), who created phenomenological methods based on the work of those philosophies. This view by Giorgi indicates the developmental trajectory philosophical phenomenology took that was later called scientific phenomenology. Equally, Giorgi (2000, 2008) provides other perspectives on using phenomenology in nursing and other disciplines by incorporating the disciplinary attitude within the approach. For example, Giorgi questioned the core nature of nurses' work as to whether nurses are here to do philosophy or caring. This justifies how nurse researchers utilized phenomenology as nurses, not philosophers.

In this paper, nurse researchers' inconsistent and improper use of such philosophies were uncovered. In detail, doing phenomenology, according to Husserl, requires researchers to incorporate a change or shift in their natural attitude towards the phenomenon under investigation to capture its appearance (Koch, 1995; Lewis & Staehler, 2010; Reeder, 2009). For example, Giorgi (1997) states that to sufficiently conduct descriptive phenomenology, researchers must be able to illustrate how the notion of reduction was applied in their respective studies. Otherwise, the work cannot be classified

as phenomenological. Nevertheless, most authors in this review ignored or underestimated the importance of incorporating a phenomenological attitude throughout their studies. This non-compliance was evident when the authors provided less emphasis when introducing essential notions of phenomenology and when they did not illustrate how those notions were used in making their research more rigorous. Equally, Norlyk and Harder (2010) highlighted similar discrepancies in their review where basic phenomenological terms, such as phenomenon, essence, reduction and bracketing, were not explicitly mentioned or used by nurse researchers, which accounted for unclear phenomena of interest.

Paley (1997) states that nurse researchers, claiming to use Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, misunderstood basic tenets of the philosophy, including the phenomenological reduction, phenomenon and essence, which resulted in research non-compatible with the original version of Husserl and, most important, confusing or ambiguous. In the same way, while acknowledging the employed research methods by nurse researchers using Husserl's phenomenology, Paley points out the importance of those methods in meeting the goals of Husserl's descriptive phenomenology and argues that nurse researchers should stay away from using Husserl's descriptive phenomenology. However, according to Giorgi (2000), Paley's critique of the nursing use of phenomenology '*failed to provide sound constructive alternatives*' (p. 11). Additionally, Paley (2017) questions the criticism directed towards nurse researchers who misuse the philosophy of phenomenology. He states, '*it is not always entirely clear what difference this neglect makes, or what novice researchers get wrong as a consequence of neglecting (or possibly misunderstanding) the philosophy in which PQR [Phenomenological Qualitative Research] is grounded*' (round brackets in the original) (p. 9). The short answer to Paley's question is that those researchers miss taking on the character of phenomenological researchers, including what the original philosophy provides, such as the proper exercise of intentionality, bracketing and intersubjectivity, which '*let data speak for themselves*'.

Furthermore, the use of phenomenology by nurse researchers has been criticized by Crotty (1996), who claimed that most phenomenological research conducted in nursing research is not phenomenological and creates a new phenomenology different from traditional phenomenology. However, Crotty's argument lacked the distinction between philosophical and scientific phenomenology, in which he could not differentiate between the philosophy of phenomenology and the scientific practice of phenomenology. In Crotty's view, following Husserl's phenomenology mandates doing philosophy, not scientific inquiries, as he provides no alternatives or alterations to phenomenology so it can be applied appropriately in nursing (Giorgi, 2000).

Incorporating phenomenology within nursing research and traditions has not been concisely endorsed (Zahavi & Martiny, 2019). The complex nature of phenomenology as a philosophy, research method or approach contributed to more misunderstandings of phenomenology by nurse researchers (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005), which also made a case for others, particularly quantitative researchers, to criticize the use of phenomenology in nursing (Omery, 1983). Unsurprisingly, the

outcome of this paper confirms the same trend of discrepancy in applying phenomenology in nursing by nurse researchers, which has been evident since the early introduction of phenomenology in nursing and continues to prevail in modern times (Bradbury-Jones, 2012; Shorey & Ng, 2022). However, this paper does not claim that nurse researchers are entirely undertaking improper phenomenological research or that their produced research is non-innovative. Moreover, the case of phenomenological nursing research and its altered practices must be acknowledged as a form of innovation in phenomenology. (Giorgi, 2017).

5.1 | Limitations

This paper has some limitations due to only including peer-reviewed studies and excluding evidence from the grey literature. In addition, using search databases other than the ones utilized in the review might result in additional vital articles being included. Also, including studies reported in English only might have missed relevant studies reported in different languages. In addition, some of the reviewed studies would have been constrained by word limits in journals that are focused on nursing practice rather than philosophical concepts. Finally, the only inclusion of phenomenological studies underpinned by Husserl's philosophy might have made this paper too narrow, limiting its implication to other phenomenological nursing research.

6 | CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING RESEARCH

The use of phenomenology in seeking and expanding nursing knowledge has also been phenomenal. However, integrating phenomenological approaches within nursing science and practice has not been smooth. Specifically, phenomenology as a philosophy, research methodology and approach is diverse and possesses critical elements, which researchers must carefully choose and apply in their research. In addition, claiming a study to be descriptive phenomenological starts with making sense of and correctly applying its basic notions in the study by nurse researchers. Therefore, researchers are required to provide readers with an overview of the utilized phenomenological notions and justifications for their application. Specifically, not complying with the traditions of Husserl's phenomenology, including their selection, justification and application, creates additional barriers for receiving and absorbing the message behind the research, which also risks applying irrelevant or inconsistent phenomenological concepts. Conducting phenomenological research studies requires researchers to frame everything in a context that promotes good research practices and enhances how others will leverage both the applied methods and the outcome of those studies.

Undertaking Husserl's phenomenology by nurse researchers can provide a variety of outcomes and levels of compliance with the basic traditions and requirements of the philosophy. This variety is distinguished in situations where nurse researchers could

not provide enough philosophical grounds and assumptions to their studies and underestimate the need for keeping up with the different applications of the phenomenological notions, such as the phenomenological attitude required to be maintained throughout the process. Moreover, conducting phenomenological studies must be consistent throughout all the study's steps. For example, complying with Husserl's phenomenological notions during the data collection needs to be sustained in the subsequent steps, such as the data analysis, interpretation and presentation of the findings. Furthermore, although nurse researchers do not need to conduct entirely philosophical work, they still need to clearly distinguish between phenomenology and other qualitative research approaches and consider the uniqueness of philosophical underpinnings necessary in phenomenology. Finally, it is wise for nurse researchers to opt for other less complex qualitative approaches if they do not have appropriate preparation and understanding of what constitutes phenomenology.

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Mohammed Al-Sheikh Hassan [MSH]: Conception, design, acquisition of data, data analysis and interpretation, writing—original draft, writing—review, and editing.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study. Some of the data extracted from the previous literature that support this paper's findings are available in this article's supplementary material.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This discussion paper was undertaken as part of a larger descriptive phenomenological PhD study, which obtained the required ethical approval from De Montfort University Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee (ref: 3175), where the author is affiliated.

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