



FirePsych, Inc.

*Specializing in Firesetting Behavior
Assessment • Training • Research*

Reilly, C., & Johnson, D. (2016). Adolescent Males and Firesetting: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth*, 33(1), 36-50. doi:10.1080/0886571X.2016.1159938

Background Information

- Much research on adolescent firesetting has focused on identifying factors that are associated with increased risk and categorizing firesetters into typologies.
- An ideographic approach can provide detailed descriptions, interpretations, and notions that add to our understanding of the behavior that nomethic research cannot.
- Those who engage in firesetting often have difficulty in accounting for their motives or have trouble understanding their behavior.
- Research suggests that adolescent firesetting has a strong correlation with anger and aggression.
- Dynamic behavior theory suggests that firesetting is reinforced as a result of changes in the sensory, affective, and cognitive states following it.

Present study:

- Aims to contribute to the limited studies that provide in-depth analysis of adolescent firesetting and its personal meaning.
- Uses hermeneutic, phenomenological, and idiographic approach.
- Assumes that pure experience is ever accessible, and therefore aims to use reduction to explore the phenomenon from different perspectives.
- Aims to lead the participant away from the distraction of general experience and their own assumptions and preconceptions to get to the essence of their firesetting experience.
- IPA will be used, an idiographic approach which focuses on the detailed characteristics of the participant's behavior within their cultural context, rather than on generalizing their behavior.

Method

- Three "high-risk" volunteers were selected from a secure care facility using purposeful sampling.
- The participants were male, 16 years old, and either sentenced for an offence or placed in secure care due to concerns regarding risk to themselves or others.
- All participants had disruption in their care and have been in various care facilities, and all had poor educational attainment and a history of substance use.

Measures

- A single 22-28 minute semi-structured interview used a small number of guided questions such as describing firesetting behavior, their thoughts, and emotions and the potential impact of firesetting on their life.
- Interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis by one researcher.

- Interview data was transcribed by once researcher verbatim.
- Transcripts were analyzed using IPA technique.

Results

- Three super-ordinate themes were identified from the analysis. The three themes provide an interpretive account of the participant's experience of firesetting.

Fire as Function-Participants set fires as a mechanism to benefit themselves.

- Warmth and Light
- Socialization
- Thrill
- Vengeance

Function Determines Acceptability- Participants described firesetting as acceptable when there was a clear function to the behavior. They viewed firesetting in the absence of a function or purpose as strange or abnormal and beyond their own experience.

Function Determines Severity- Participants appeared to hold beliefs that the acceptable severity of the fire was determined by the intended function, and regulated by certain rules. These rules appeared to normalize what was acceptable or not for each function.

Abstract completed by Alaina Millard