

## **Considering voice hearing by psychic practitioners: A qualitative pluralistic investigation of mental health and well-being**

### **ABSTRACT:**

#### **Background**

This research is a qualitative pluralistic project concerned with clairaudience experienced by psychic practitioners. A key aspect of the research is to use different methods of qualitative analysis to analyse the same data. The different emphases of these approaches were expected to provide complementary insights into the target phenomenon. The study builds on previous research with mediums, to identify and explore clairaudience in a sample of psychic practitioners who do not have religious or professional affiliations that provide explanatory frameworks for these lived experiences.

#### **Aims**

Studies with non-clinical voice-hearing samples, such as psychic practitioners, suggest the importance of the meaning that experiencers make of these voices for positive wellbeing. The aim of this research was to identify what factors protect against distress (as found in clinical samples of voice hearers) for people who hear voices but do not require service support.

#### **Method**

The research methodology took an interpretative pluralistic qualitative design, whereby a set of qualitative data analysis methods are applied to the same data set. Such an approach has been recommended to be particularly useful for studying anomalous experiences, where the ontological status of parapsychological phenomena is contested. Fourteen mediums were interviewed for the study. Data were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis, narrative analysis and discourse analysis.

#### **Results**

Across the three different analyses of data we identified themes in relation to achieving a mediumistic identity and making sense of their experiences. All mediums in our study recounted early life traumas (often compounded by later life traumas) that pre-dated the development of their psychic abilities and mediumistic work. Participants expressed concerns about and drew distinctions between mediumistic practice and poor mental health, although they had difficulty in disclosing their experiences and seeking help due to their perception of negative attitudes by others. In contrast to the anticipated negative responses of others, participants had developed clear ideas about what constituted mental health, mental illness and mediumistic ability for them, which they recognised did not fully accord with commonly held views in wider society or by clinicians. Despite the benefits of adopting a mediumistic understanding of the self to process past traumas and make sense of anomalous experiences, mediumistic work itself could at times provide its own challenges to mental health, such as in exposure to the distress of clients.

### **Conclusions**

The findings suggest a number of areas for consideration by clinicians who may work with mediums or their clients. In particular, the research highlights the value of not dismissing or attempting to change appraisals of valued aspects of mediums' anomalous experiences. However, the findings do indicate that support for exposure to clients' difficulties (such as vicarious trauma) might be helpful, in the same way in which other professionals might receive support with such experiences.

### **Keywords**

Voice-hearing, Hearing-voices, Mediums, Psychics

### **Published Work:**

Murray, C. D., & Wilde, D. J. (in press). Thinking about, doing and writing up research using interpretative phenomenological analysis. In Walshe, C., & Brierley, S. (Eds.), *Handbook of Theory and Methods in Applied Health Research*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Valavanis, S., Thompson, C., & Murray, C. D. (2019). Positive aspects of voice-hearing: a qualitative metasynthesis. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 22(2), 208-225. doi: 10.1080/13674676.2019.1601171

Wilde, D. J., Murray, J., Doherty, P., & Murray, C. D. (2019). Mental health and mediumship: an interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 22(3), 261-278, doi: 10.1080/13674676.2019.1606186

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