

Lecture

## The Meaning of Movement Quality in Autism - Specialized Physiotherapists' Experiences in a Phenomenological Study

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**Aim:** To describe the meaning of movement quality in autism, as experienced by specialized physiotherapists.

**Introduction:** The body expresses integrated sensory impressions, their psychological interpretation, and emotions related to the experiences - thereby affecting movement quality. Movement quality, represented in unrestricted movements, flow and pleasure, is often lacking in people with autism. Understanding body and movement expressions in people with autism is essential, in the sense of 'I move - I do - I can'.

**Method:** Ten physiotherapists, specialized in working with people with autism and movement quality, were interviewed. The data were recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed, using Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method. The analysis resulted in a general structure of the meaning of the phenomenon movement quality in autism, including key constituents.

**Results:** The general structure of the movement pattern was described as fragmented, restrained and hesitant. The eight key constituents were difficulties with:

1. postural control
2. muscle tone
3. sensory processing
4. conscious awareness
5. body boundaries
6. coordinating movements
7. anticipatory preparations
8. automated movements - cognition was needed to control them

### Conclusions

- People with autism were described living a body, partly unavailable to them
- Their lived bodies needed to protect them from sensory impressions
- The intention and meaning of movements became obscured
- The meaning of movement quality lacked in being whole and vital
- Understanding movement patterns in autism may further improve physiotherapy interventions.

