

# The Phenomenology of Distressing Near-death Experiences and Their Aftereffects<sup>1</sup>

Amal Ait Melloul    Karolina Kinnunen    Etzel Cardeña

Lund University

**Abstract.** *Objective:* To explore what it is like to have a distressing near-death experience (NDE) and its aftereffects. *Method:* We accessed all distressing NDE narratives from the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) database and analyzed eight individual narratives using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). *Results:* Distressing NDEs include features such as disturbing feelings and experiences of darkness and frightening images in different forms. Participants reported emotional and social difficulties in dealing with the NDE afterwards. Aftereffects such as receiving negative feedback when talking about the experience and heightened emotions were mentioned. We found hybrid experiences, where the distressing experience had positive features as well. *Conclusion:* Future research about NDEs should focus on hybrid experiences and employ mixed methods and more qualitative research in general.

*Keywords:* Near-death experience, IPA, distressing near-death experience, hybrid near-death experience, NDE

## Highlights

- We conducted an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of all thick narratives of distressing NDE narratives in the IANDS database.
- Such NDE include disturbing feelings and experiences in various forms, but some of them were hybrid and included both positive and negative aspects.
- The aftereffects could also be positive or negative.

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<sup>1</sup> Address correspondence to Etzel Cardeña, Ph. D., CERCAP, Department of Psychology, Lund University, Allhelgona kyrkogata 16a-b, Lund, 22100, Sweden, [etzel.cardena@psy.lu.se](mailto:etzel.cardena@psy.lu.se). We thank IANDS for sharing their database with us. The acting editor for this paper was David Marcusson-Clavertz.

There have been reports of people having vivid experiences when being close (or believing they were close) to dying or pronounced dead but later resuscitated. These experiences have been called near-death experiences or NDEs for short (Moody, 1975). NDEs are vivid, complex, and realistic experiences (Bush, 1991; Greyson et al., 2009; Noyes et al., 2009). Examples of life-threatening conditions that might lead to an NDE include loss of consciousness, head injury, states of shock, cardiac arrest, childbirth, allergic reactions, surgery, and suicide attempts (Bush, 2012; Facco et al., 2015; Ring, 1980). There are no two identical near-death experiences, but they usually include features such as: a clear perception of being in a different dimension; feelings of peace, and well-being; separation from the body; telepathic communication; meeting deceased relatives and/or other spiritual figures; traveling through a tunnel; and feeling like one is floating (Greyson, 1983; Greyson et al., 2009; Moody, 1975; Ring, 1982).

People who have had NDEs generally have a very vivid, detailed, and stable memory of the events of their experience (Cassol et al., 2020; Martial et al., 2017; Moore & Greyson, 2017). The NDE memories play a role in how near-death experiencers (NDErs) view themselves and their identity. Near-death experiencers have also had significantly more life changes after their experience than those who have experienced a life-threatening situation without an NDE (Cassol et al., 2019a), which indicates that there is something beyond the life-threatening situations that leads to the effects reported by NDErs

Most experiencers have positive heaven-like experiences that can include positive emotions, seeing a bright light, and God or other religious figures, but others have hell-like experiences with features such as distressing emotions and a threatening environment. There is still no known way to predict when someone will experience an NDE as it is not associated with demographics, personality traits, religious beliefs, or the duration of a state of unconsciousness (Greyson, 2003b; Parnia et al., 2001; van Lommel, 2011). The prevalence for NDEs ranges from 0.1% to 15% in different countries (Gallup & Proctor, 1982; Greyson, 2003a; Knoblauch et al., 2001; Pasricha, 1995; Perera et al., 2005; Ring & Lawrence, 1993; Sabom, 2011). These experiences are reported by 6% to 23% of cardiac arrest survivors (Parnia et al., 2001; Schwanager et al., 2002; van Lommel et al., 2001) and 37% of survivors of coma (Yamamura, 1998).

### **Distressing NDEs**

Although most reports of NDEs are positive, some have been negative or distressing. Frightening, distressing, or hellish NDEs refer to experiences in which the dominant theme of the event is fright, fear, concern for one's safety and well-being, shock,

despair, panic, or guilt. Distressing NDEs are underreported out of fear, shame, and social stigma (Bonenfant, 2001; Bush, 2012; Rawlings, 1978). There have been few estimates of the prevalence of distressing NDEs, ranging from 1% to 20% of all NDEs (Bush, 2009; Charland-Verville et al., 2014; Groth-Marnat & Summers, 1998; Lindley et al., 1981).

Distressing and positive NDEs usually share a similar pattern of elements but with different emotional content. They are both likely to have out-of-body experiences, a sense of journeying, encountering beings, and an experience of another realm. Having a positive NDE might include friendly beings, beautiful environments, and an overwhelming sensation of love. In contrast, distressing NDEs might include lifeless or threatening beings, harsh environments, and danger (Atwater, 1994; Grey, 1985). Greyson and Bush (1992) have described three types of distressing NDEs: inverted, void, and hell.

### **Inverted Experiences**

Inverted NDEs are similar to positive ones, but the experiences are interpreted as unpleasant. According to Greyson and Bush (1992) the inverted experience is the most common type of a distressing NDE. It is not necessarily the content in the NDE that is terrifying, but the person's interpretation of it is. Situations might move too fast or the NDEr might feel helpless. There can also be a feeling that the reality they know is falling apart into something unknown. Someone with an inverted experience might feel that they do not know what is happening to them and that they are not supposed to experience it (Bush, 2012; Ring, 1984).

### **Void Experiences**

Another kind of distressing NDE is being in a void, which can be described as an experience of nothingness, without any sensation, and a feeling of existing in a limitless and featureless void. A void NDE might include out-of-body episodes, a sense of movement and great speed, intense emotions, strong messages, and sometimes encounters with other presences (Bush, 2012; Greyson & Bush, 1992). Some people experience a sense of being forsaken and abandoned by God. It is not uncommon to feel a lasting sense of emptiness even after the experience. Particularly people from Western cultures may be poorly prepared for the emptiness and the nothingness in void experiences, since their identity depends on persons or things to ground them,

whereas Asian cultures in general are more familiar with the concept of emptiness or detachment, which void experiences may resemble (Bush, 2012).

### **Hellish Experiences**

A distressing NDE can include experiences of hell or hellish features, including different kinds of sounds, sights, and sensations. The hellish NDE can consist of features such as darkness, fire, screeching blackbirds, demons, beings with obscured faces, and bleak landscapes; the NDE may also have features of the devil or other menacing demonic figures (Atwater, 1992; Cassol et al., 2019b; Grey, 1985; Greyson & Bush, 1992; Rawlings, 1978; Ring, 1984). According to Bush (2012) strong feelings of fear and panic are common during hellish NDEs. It is common to feel fear during a hellish NDE, but it is also common to be scared of the fear itself. Another common pattern in hellish NDEs is that people usually experience them as an observer and see others being tormented or suffering but do not necessarily experience that same torment themselves.

### **Hybrid Experiences**

Some NDErs have both negative and positive components in their experience, so called hybrid NDEs. According to Sabom (1982), an NDE can start out as an initial passage into darkness, followed by questions about what is going on. In time the experience becomes positive, filled with calm, peace, and tranquility. Ring (1980) and Bush (2012) have also suggested that some NDErs may be stuck in the fearful part of their NDE and that if they were to join and accept it, the fear might turn into peace. It is also possible that a positive NDE might turn into a distressing one, but that is less common (e.g., in Irwin & Bramwell, 1988).

### **Making Sense of an NDE**

There is no clear answer as to why some NDErs have positive and others distressing experiences. Previous retrospective studies have shown that NDErs do not differ from other comparison groups in terms of age, gender, race, religion, religiosity, or mental health (Holden et al., 2009), nor intelligence, neuroticism, extraversion, or state anxiety (Locke & Shontz, 1983). Nevertheless, there seems to be a difference in how NDErs manage and attribute meaning to their NDEs.

### *Sense of Control During an NDE*

Individual differences when coping with one's NDE have to do with the ability to cope and process an unknown and indescribable event, and sense of control may differ when processing an NDE, since NDErs need to make sense of their NDE using previous knowledge and experiences (Roberts & Owen, 1988). There are NDErs who have reported that their experiences have included events where they felt "out of control." For a person who has been used to being calm and in control an NDE can be frightening and risky. At the same time, there are those who enjoy risk taking, the adrenaline rush, and the feeling of being on the edge. Being able to trust one's own ability to handle anything can be reassuring. Thus, how a person reacts or copes with an NDE might lie in the ability to tolerate the risk of being drawn to the unknown (Bush, 2012).

There is a variation in the degree to which a person experiences a sense of control during an NDE. In a state where one feels out of control and where there is no person to blame, the search for a moral agent can give the experience meaning and a sense of control. Feeling hurt or pain may lead to the search for an agent, because it is important for people to seek guidance when experiencing negative emotions (Bering, 2002; Seligman, 1975).

Making sense of one's NDE can be influenced by whether one attributes the cause of the experience to oneself or external factors. Those who experience more distressing NDEs might ask themselves afterwards why they had such an experience. There is often a sense of why me, what have I done to deserve this horrible experience? (Bush, 2012). In a case study by Irwin and Bramwell (1988), a girl reported that she believed that the physical injuries from the accident that led to her NDE were a way of repenting for her sins.

Distressing NDEs may be influenced by negative beliefs, life patterns, or mental status. Some researchers hypothesize that if you believe that hell exists, you will experience it in your NDE (Atwater, 1992; Rommer, 2000). In contrast, Bush (2002) emphasizes that anyone could have a distressing or a positive experience, no matter what their mental status is or whether they are morally deserving of it or not.

### **Aftereffects**

Experiencing an NDE can cause profound changes in people's attitudes, beliefs, and values. NDE aftereffects have often been reported to be overwhelmingly positive and include being less materialistic, having a greater concern for others, increased

self-esteem (Greyson, 2014; Jahromi, 2021; Moody, 1975; Ring, 1984), a stronger belief in an afterlife and a greater appreciation for life (Foster et al., 2009; Groth-Marnat & Summers, 1998; van Lommel et al., 2001). Approximately 75–80% have reported feeling more spiritual after their NDE (Musgrave, 1997; Sutherland, 1995) and about 80% report a lessened or lost fear of death (Ring, 1980; Sabom, 1982).

However, for many NDEers, “returning to the real world” has led to a crisis in their previous worldview, which may cause increased anxiety, depression, alienation, relationship problems, and a sense of altered reality after their NDE (Bush, 1991; Foster et al., 2009; Stout et al., 2006), and approximately 65% go through a divorce when one partner has experienced an NDE (Christian & Holden, 2012). Many NDEers do not dare to talk about their near-death experience and its aftereffects to health professionals or others in their social network, considering the stigma and fear of being seen as mentally ill or demonic (Bianco et al., 2017; Morris & Knafli, 2003).

### *Positive Aftereffects After a Distressing NDE*

Frightening NDE usually generates some form of transformation within the experiencer. The positive aftereffects include reduced death anxiety (Bush, 2002), decreased materialism, deeper concern for others, (Irwin & Bramwell, 1988) and an increased interest in religion and spirituality (Bonenfant, 2001). For some, experiencing a frightening or even a hellish NDE can be seen as a warning and as an opportunity to change a lifestyle to avoid the consequences that might otherwise come. Religious NDEers may identify this as atoning for their own sins. Others may process their NDE by reducing its significance and focusing more on the positive aspects of the experience (Bush, 2002).

### *Negative Aftereffects After a Distressing NDE*

Some NDEers have experienced negative aftereffects and question their previous beliefs, mental status, life patterns, and what they have done to deserve an experience like this. Some concerns may be about what is wrong with one or what the truth about existence is, and for some pessimism and fear of death remain even after their NDE (Bush, 2002). A distressing NDE can produce long-lasting emotional distress, including fear of others’ judgment, high fear of reliving the frightening experience, increased vulnerability, and anxiety (Greyson, 1997). One case study by Bonenfant (2001) described how a boy experienced symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, restlessness, and nightmares after his NDE where he briefly encountered the devil.

Hoffman (1995) reported that an older man who had experienced a hellish-like NDE was haunted by it afterwards.

People who have experienced a distressing NDE are more likely to develop negative long-term psychological and emotional symptoms. Those who have experienced a distressing NDE are more likely to repress their experience and report a sense of emptiness and despair as well as an unwillingness to talk about their experience out of fear of being dismissed or seen as mentally ill (Greyson & Bush, 1992). Others have felt that therapy or conversations with priests have been ineffective, because therapists cannot get to the real problem, or priests have rejected their experience or not known how to respond to it, so that they feel betrayed by religion or by their previous perception of the afterlife (Bush, 2012).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore what it is like to have a distressing NDE and its aftereffects through interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Rather than simply relying on impressions or writing a case study, we systematically analyzed all distressing NDE narratives found in a database. There have been a few studies that examined positive NDEs using IPA (e.g., Bianco et al., 2017; Hou et al., 2013; Wilde & Murray, 2009) and other qualitative methods (e.g., Cassol et al., 2018; Khoshab et al., 2020; Royse & Badger, 2020). Research about distressing NDEs has been mainly based on quantitative methods. This study is, to the best of our knowledge, the first to explore distressing NDEs and their aftereffects using a qualitative method encompassing all relevant observations within a database. By using a qualitative approach, we can learn more detailed information about a topic that has been understudied.

### **Method**

We used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which uses basic principles from phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography by combining a focus on subjective experiences, interpretation of text, and an understanding of an individual retrospective account (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009; Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). IPA is a qualitative method that studies how people understand and give meaning to their experiences. It assumes that people are self-interpreting beings, actively engaged in interpreting experiences, objects, and people. The aim of analyzing data with IPA is to make a thorough analysis of individual cases before any potential generalization (Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA is especially suitable to study

phenomena that are either complex, involve a psychological process of some kind, or express something new (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA is also suitable to study anomalous experiences, a category of experiences that includes NDEs (Cardeña et al., 2014; Wilde & Murray, 2009).

According to Smith (1996), one cannot experience a phenomenon without interpretation. He points out that IPA deals with a sort of double hermeneutic, which means that participants try to understand their life world while the researcher in turn tries to understand the participants' understanding of their world. Our goal with this study was not to probe the ontological nature of NDEs, but to arrive to a deeper understanding of what it is like to experience a distressing NDE. We acknowledge that our own personal perspectives could have had an impact on how we interpreted the data. During the research process we had continuous discussions about how our pre-understanding could affect the study.

### Data Selection

We received from the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) an anonymized data file only with participants' basic information such as the circumstances of the NDE, age and gender, and the age at which the participants had their NDE. IANDS also asked participants to fill out several questionnaires about their NDE and describe their experience in their own words. The experiences were collected from 2016 onward and the narratives ranged from 1-4 pages long. One of these questionnaires was the *Near-Death Experience Scale*, a 16-item multiple-choice questionnaire to measure the intensity of the NDE and to assess key components of its features (Greyson, 1983). A score of 7 or higher (max 32) on the scale is considered to represent an NDE (Greyson, 1983; Lange et al., 2004). A score below 7 in the Scale was an exclusion criterion in our study.

We accessed the data of 39 out of 499 participants from the database, all of those who had rated their experience as frightening and specified that their data may be used for research. Of these 39 participants only 30 had filled out narratives about their experiences. The experiences could be entirely distressing or partly distressing, meaning that some parts of the NDE were described as positive. Participants who did not have a narrative were not included.

Our second sorting of experiences involved the exclusion of narratives that did not have a thick description and of narratives that described other anomalous experiences than an NDE. According to Ryle (1949) a thick description includes both ob-



servations, descriptions, interpretation, and analysis of a situation. By having a thick description, one can interpret data and generate meaning. In comparison, a thin description only includes a short surface level explanation of a situation and does not explore underlying meanings. That is why we decided to exclude the narratives that had too thin descriptions of their NDEs and/or their aftereffects. We defined aftereffects as participants' descriptions of how the NDE had affected them afterwards. Since participants had been specifically asked to describe only their NDE not everyone included descriptions of their aftereffects.

Other exclusion criteria were narratives with descriptions of other people's NDEs and narratives only about aftereffects, but lacking information about the NDE itself. We did, however, include narratives that had thick descriptions of the NDE but lacked descriptions of their aftereffects. In the last screening we only included participants who were in a physically life-threatening condition at the time of their NDE.

### **Analysis**

We used Smith et al.'s (2009) approach and steps for IPA when analyzing the narratives. First, we got an overview of all the narratives, one at a time, by reading and re-reading them thoroughly. The two first authors did this independently from each other to ensure reliability and a breadth of perspective on possible themes. After the individual analysis of the narrative, they merged the themes they had both identified through a joint discussion. Following the discussion, they agreed on which themes to add, change, or discard before moving on to the next narrative. All agreed themes were written down for each individual narrative, and this process was repeated for every participant's narrative. The last step was to cluster all the identified themes into the following categories: themes, master themes, and super-ordinate themes. Then, themes that were either similar or related to each other in some other way were clustered and master themes and higher-level super-ordinate themes were developed. Every identifying category is summarized in table 2.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Microethical aspects such as voluntary participation and informed participation, as per Brinkmann and Kvale (2005,) were considered. The narratives and the background information accessed were de-identified. Participants had voluntarily submit-

ted their NDEs through the IANDS website and had given consent for their experiences to be used for research purposes. Thus, the design of the study did not include any aspect that would require ethical review according to the Swedish Act concerning the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans.

## Results

### Participants

We included eight participants' narratives in our study, all of them with scores of 7 or higher on the Greyson NDE scale (most of them had considerably higher scores than the cutoff one). All participants have been given pseudonyms and Table 1 shows their demographics.

**Table 1**

*Demographic and NDE Information*

Name	Gender	Age	Age of NDE	Circumstan
Ryan	M	38	30	Illness
Ellie	F	20	20	Childbirth
Jack	M	39	27	Overdose
Chad	M	45	30	Overdose
Suzanne	F	67	22	Drowning
Gary	M	47	7	Allergies
Luke	M	40	11	Car accident
Lily	F	39	38	Allergies

## Experiences and Aftereffects

The analysis conducted on the eight narratives allowed us to identify three super-ordinate themes: a dark unsettling experience, fighting the frightening, and aftereffects of the distressing NDE. The super-ordinate themes *a dark unsettling experience* and *fighting the frightening* contained descriptions from the NDE itself. Aftereffects dealt with how the participants processed and dealt with the experience afterwards. Each super-ordinate theme included groups of themes called master themes. The master themes consisted of themes from codes from the analysis process (see table 2). Some quotes originally had misspellings. These quotes have been carefully corrected to avoid changing the meaning of the text.

**Table 2.**

### Thematic Framework

Super-ordinate themes	Master themes	Themes
1. A dark unsettling experience	1.1 Distressing feelings	1.1.1 Fear
		1.1.2 Confusion
	1.2 Darkness	1.2.1 Dark realm
		1.2.2 Hell
	1.3 Questioning of worthiness	1.3.1 The judgment
		1.3.2 Self questioning of worthiness
2. Fighting the frightening	2.1 Sense of control	2.1.1 Feeling in control
		2.1.2 Feeling not in control
	2.2 Desperate to be saved	2.2.1 Plea for help
		2.2.2 Rescued
	2.3 The rejection	2.3.1 Rejection
3. Aftereffects of the distressing NDE	3.1 Positive aftereffects	3.1.1 High on life
	3.2 Negative aftereffects	3.2.1 Not being understood
		3.2.2 Negative emotions



## 1. A Dark Unsettling Experience

All eight participants expressed that their NDE was dark or unsettling in some way. The participants described distressing feelings, experiences of darkness, hell, and a fundamental questioning of their own worth. Three master themes were identified from the data: Distressing feelings, darkness, and questioning of worthiness.

### 1.1 Distressing Feelings

Distressing feelings were reported by all participants during their NDE. Seven participants felt different kinds of fear, such as fear upon realizing that they were dead and fear of beings or the surroundings since it was not like anything they encountered before. Three participants experienced confusion and panic, while they were struggling to figure out what was happening to them. Lily and Jack were two of the participants who expressed intense fear when realizing that they had indeed died or would.

Lily: I felt a fear so strong that it was suffocating. I've never feared dying, because in the end we all end up dying, but this? It felt different, as if some supernatural force was trying to pull my soul out of my body. It didn't feel like it was my time to go, maybe I was too young- maybe this shouldn't kill me and I vividly remember everything being muffled, like I was underwater.

Like Lily, Jack also felt intense fear and panic when he realized he had died.

Jack: Suddenly I was before myself looking at my body lying there, and realized I was dead. I panicked and thought this shouldn't be happening and I looked all around my apartment for some escape.

In addition to the intense feeling of fear, three participants reported confusion about the state they were in. They were not familiar with the conditions of their experience. Gary expressed this confusion in the beginning of his NDE. He felt calm yet confused but also wanted nothing more than to wake up. He did not understand where he was and why he was feeling the way he did.

Gary: I felt the sensation of a period of time passing, and entered a dream-like state that turned into something of a nightmare that I could not wake up from. There was a strange physical sensation as I was looking down on someone in a bed with doctors working around them. It seemed to be nighttime. I felt calm, but at the same time wanted to wake up. I felt kind of

confused and had not made the cognitive connection as to who that was in the bed.

Ryan also described feeling very confused in the beginning of his NDE. He expressed that it must be a dream and questioned whether his experience was real or not. He was shocked with the way he was treated in his NDE and could not help but feel deeply disturbed.

Ryan: In utter shock and disbelief, I thought to myself 'This must be a dream. This can't be real.' Echoes of laughter came from afar. Maybe not wanting the answers but I could not help questioning what was taking place. 'Not me?' was another thought that raced through my head as I believed the gravity of the situation was beginning to fall on my shoulders. 'Where do you think they send angry fuckin drunks when they die dumbass?' Came from a broken-down man standing about 10 feet in front of me. His words were condescending, but his tone was resolute. I was frozen! The purest and most disturbing form of shock I have ever felt.

This master theme shows how the participants try to make sense of their unknown experience. They have no or little idea as to what is happening, which causes them to both panic and feel intense fear. They felt their emotions more strongly than before, suggesting that the way that they experience emotions in their NDEs differs from how they normally perceive them.

### *1.2 Darkness*

Four out of eight participants described that their NDE had some sort of dark aspects to it. These participants had generally dark experiences, for instance being in a void. Additionally, three out of four reported that they had had outright hell or hell-like experiences. Two expressed that the experience started out being in darkness and turned more hell-like as it progressed. Gary was one of those experiencing a dark void, where it almost felt like he was stuck in darkness.

Gary: At some point I met others, and we were in this dark void. Imagine you are wandering around in a large, dark room and meeting other people along the way, and we are all working together trying to find out what happened and why we are here.

In some ways similar to Gary, Ryan also experienced a strong and powerful darkness in the beginning of his NDE.

Ryan: There was a barrier of pitch-black darkness, darker and denser than the midnight sky, surrounding this God barren landscape. As I got closer to the darkness I felt my body being repelled back from it like the same pole of two magnets meeting each other for the first time. It was impossible! I was stuck!... Random 'people' in the crowd would scream out answers in the distance as if they could read my mind. The first question, of course, being 'what is this place?' 'Hell!!! Mutha Fucka!! Where do you think you're at?' Came from a man in the distance on a balcony of sorts...I guess in order for this hellish game to continue it had to be that way. The only thing I could do was pick up whatever I could find and start hitting back. The speed at which everybody could move was unheard of. They ran like track stars, threw blows like boxers while wielding weapons like warriors. Things moved at such a fast pace! And from what I could see, a lot of the 'people' loved what they were doing. There was pure pleasure in the violence! What could I do but try to defend myself and fight back but there were so many of them and I was the freshest 'meat' on the market and the Vultures were picking away every bit of my 'carcass.' It was relentless.

Like Ryan, Jack also described how he entered a hell-like place in the beginning of his NDE.

Jack: When we walked past the stairwell, the hallway began lengthening and got dark, and they began to taunt me. They were holding my back, and their faces lit up like demons as they disparaged me. We came to a wall of fire, like the opening of a pit, and my face was forced forward with their hands, made to look. I saw bodies in pain, people there who were crying in torment.

This master theme illustrates how the darkness takes over the experiences. Participants find themselves in a dark void or hellish place. They are desperately trying to figure out how to escape or get out of this experience which seems hopeless. There was a sense of wondering what is happening and how come this is happening.

### *1.3 Questioning of Worthiness*

Three participants reported some sort of awaiting judgment or questioning of worthiness, their worthiness was being judged by God or some being, while two participants questioned their own worthiness. Chad was one of them, waiting for something or someone to judge him. He expressed it as "It was like I was in some sort of purgatory of

sorts, and I was waiting for something. I had an eerie feeling of emptiness and sadness.” Chad expressed unpleasant feelings while he was waiting for some kind of judgment. It was like he felt in his gut that something wrong was happening. By contrast, Ryan felt that he was already paying for all his wrongdoings in his life. He described the feeling that his NDE confirmed his belief that he was not worthy in God’s eyes.

Ryan: You know the feeling you get when you get caught doing something you know was wrong... Well, imagine that same feeling multiplied exponentially due to the fact that I was reaping what I had sowed for an entire lifetime... There are no words that can encapsulate the most dreadful feeling that I have ever felt with a single thought. ‘It’s over!’ Oh, even now it makes me want to throw up. Not only will I never see my loved ones again but the God whom I loved throughout my life doesn’t want me. My lifelong assumption that I wasn’t worthy was now verified.

Suzanne also expressed difficult feelings during her NDE. She was levitating (having an out-of-body experience) and questioning her own worth. She expressed fear of not having done enough in her lifetime and thus not deserving to go to heaven.

Suzanne: As I levitated over the bench, intuitively I knew this force was in control. I remember thinking this light must be God. My cloud-like self was shaking with fear. A kind of fear I’ve never experienced before. I was scared that I was going to be judged and found not worthy enough to go into heaven. I was fearful that I hadn’t been living my earthly life to the divine fullest! I was no saint, and I wasn’t all bad either.

This master theme shows how the participants were fearfully questioning their own worthiness. They felt as if they were being punished for not being good enough in their life or not doing good enough deeds. They felt an intense sadness, almost grief-like in nature, over their NDE. They were grieving the fact that the distressing experience indeed proved that they are not worthy nor good enough to be saved by God or another being.

## 2. Fighting the Frightening

All participants reported some sort of struggle during their experience. The NDE or parts of their NDE felt frightening in some way. The struggle could be about fleeing one’s NDE or trying to gain some sense of control. Three master themes were identified: Sense of control, desperate to be saved, and rejection.

## 2.1 Sense of Control

Seven participants reported different levels of control during their distressing experience, two felt somewhat in control of their experience, while five almost felt hopeless trying to control the outcome of their NDE. Ryan described how he was fighting to escape during the last moments of his NDE.

Ryan: Nothing or nobody was going to stop me, no matter how hard they tried. And believe me, they were giving it their all. I began to feel the repellent force of the Darkness pushing me back as I got closer to the border. It got so strong that I fell to my knees fighting a force I could not see. Pushing and crawling further and further as I'm being pulled back by what felt like a hundred hands scraping and clawing over every inch of my body. Feeling complete exhaustion begin to set in, I gave one last plunge out into the darkness.

Ryan described having some sense of control, but this was not the case for everyone. Five described how external forces were more in control than they were. Both Ellie and Chad reported how they were forced out from their physical bodies.

Ellie: I saw white hands and arms reach for me out of the OR ceiling and felt calmness for a second, but then the hands grabbed me and removed me from my body. My initial reaction was 'this is it' fear set in and I saw dark shadows around me and the white light. Then I felt a strong shove and I opened my eyes, and my husband was there. I believe still to this day if he didn't walk in, if he wasn't there, I wouldn't have come back.

Like her, Chad was one of the NDEr who also expressed being forced from his physical body.

Chad: I remember being pulled out of my body into the whiteness, and it was very confusing. I didn't know where I was, or how I got there, and I didn't have any shape or body mass, I was just there.

Jack, on the other hand, reported how men came and demanded that he follow them. His experience quickly turned grim as the men became demonic.

Jack: There was a knock at the door. I opened the door and there were three men who said they had to take me away. I explained that they needed to take me to the hospital, as I was lying there on the floor, but they demanded to take me and so I came with them out into the hall. When we walked past



the stairwell, the hallway began lengthening and got dark, and they began to taunt me. They were holding my back, and their faces lit up like demons as they disparaged me.

This master theme illustrates that while the participants were fighting their experience, some managed to feel more in control than others. For some this meant being able to actually affect and change the course of their NDE, for others it meant that outside forces were able to help them escape. Being in control or feeling that someone/something else was in control seems to play some sort of role in how the experience itself is interpreted.

### *2.2 Desperate to Be Saved*

Half of the participants expressed a desperate desire to be saved from their distressing NDE. Two participants expressed a sort of plea to God or some other power to save them from their horrible experiences and two described how religious figures came and saved them during their NDE. Suzanne appealed to God and expressed it as: "I prayed again, 'God, please don't take me. I haven't done enough in your name.' There I was, hanging on for dear life trying to bargain with God to give me more time on earth." Ryan, on the other hand, was one of the two participants who described how a religious figure saved him during his NDE.

Ryan: If I didn't come across this little girl (Angel), who could only have been 3 or 4 years old, I know I wouldn't be here writing this right now... Her calmness gave me solace for that brief moment. She said, 'you haven't been here that long, you can still go back.' A feeling I had already lost and probably forgotten about slowly returned. Hope! How was my only question! She said 'you have to feel it! Feel being back where you were before you got here'.

This master theme shows how important it was for the participants to strive to get out of their distressing experience. They prayed and looked for some higher power to help them get out of their NDE. There was a form of desire to be rescued and to have a second chance to survive and come back to life.

### *2.3 The Rejection*

Out of eight participants, two described feeling rejected during their NDE. It was

like they were not heard or understood, or just plainly left to their own devices. They almost felt invisible. This was frightening on its own since they wanted help during their various distressing experiences. Chad described this feeling thus:

Chad: There was this lingering feeling that I had come too soon... Maybe they were calling to my grandmother because I needed someone familiar to send me back to where I came from? So, it wouldn't scare me as much? However, I was absolutely terrified, and I didn't know what was real and what was fake. One of the most intense parts of it was that nobody spoke, it was just known already in my head what they were saying, and me back. After what was what felt like a strong feeling of rejection, and what I thought was them trying to get my grandmother to come forward for some reason, I literally just ran away desperately trying to get to somewhere else.

This master theme illustrates how distressing it was for the participants to be in an unknown experience. Hoping to make sense of what they were going through, they tried to find something familiar in their environment that would reduce their sense of discomfort. Not knowing what would happen next or experiencing a form of communication they had never experienced before led to confusion and fear. An unfamiliar form of communication and the feeling that no one in their NDE understood or gave any answers as to why they were there made them feel rejected and alone in their experience.

### **3. Aftereffects of the Distressing NDE**

Six of eight NDErs described that their experience profoundly changed their lives afterwards. Some changes concerned their personal attitudes towards life, while others were about changes in their personality. Dealing with the experience and processing it afterwards gave rise to both negative and positive emotions. Two master themes were hence identified: positive and negative aftereffects.

#### *3.1 Positive Aftereffects*

A third of the participants who described aftereffects reported positive changes in their personal attitudes toward life. Two participants reported that they felt more open, hopeful, and positive because of their NDEs. Luke expressed it as: "I don't want to sound crazy, but my mind is open, I'm passionate, have super high senses, taste, smell, thoughts. I'm fascinated by people, systems and technology." Gary described a

similar aftereffect: “I remember getting home and walking into my bedroom, the sun was shining through the window, and I felt very positive about the future, very hopeful, and happy to be here. I was high on life.” Both participants described a new passion and appreciation for their lives because of their NDEs.

This master theme shows how participants’ personal attitudes changed positively despite their distressing experience. It seems that their NDE provided some kind of awakening and an increased appreciation for surviving and having a second chance at life. Surviving and coming back to life led to happiness and a focus on all the positive things the new life had to offer.

### *3.2 Negative Aftereffects*

Five of the six participants who described aftereffects reported negative reactions. They included disbelief from others and an increase in negative emotions. Half of the participants described not being understood or believed when talking about their NDEs to others. They still reported having a strong conviction that their NDE was in fact real. Gary was one of the participants who tried to talk about his experience but received negative feedback in return.

Gary: I’ve tried speaking of this experience to my family, close friends and girlfriends over the years, and their reactions have taught me to be quiet about it. I guess it’s a crazy story after all, and I suppose had I not experienced this for myself I would have a hard time believing such a thing.

Just like Gary, Ryan had a hard time telling others about his NDE. He tried to explain that his experience was real and was convinced that it was.

Ryan: I tried to explain what had just happened to the Doctors, but I could tell it was just falling on deaf ears...Do you think for a second that you are dreaming right now? No? My conviction is just the same!!

Similarly, Suzanne was not believed either when she talked about her NDE.

Suzanne: I was naked, bloody and twisted up in my bathing suit. I laid down on the beach and my boyfriend came to my side. I was murmuring something to him. He replied, ‘Don’t ever tell anyone that. They’ll lock you up in a mental institution.’ For years my boyfriend’s words kind of froze my resolve. Over the years I experienced a few difficult relationships in my work



and personal life, I believed what people were inferring about me at the time, not being worthy and what I had to say was not valid. That belief only strengthened my ex-boyfriend's warning. But my NDE was real, and I couldn't stop thinking about it every day.

In addition to the feeling of not being understood or believed, there were two participants that felt haunted by their NDE afterwards. Four out of six participants reported strong negative emotions and questioned the circumstances of their survival and life after death. Ellie was one of the participants who reported that she changed vastly after her distressing experience.

Ellie: After everything I started waking up in panic, I have been seeing a woman who looks exactly like me staring at me. Dressed like me, hair like me everything like me. She also pops up randomly out of the corner of my eye or in reflections etc. It started out calming now I am terrified of her. I am scared of the dark and of being completely alone. I can't sleep at night by myself and I am panicking easier. I get real angry real easy and lose my temper more than ever. I am quick to cry and feel guilty after an argument with my husband I am feeling increasingly isolated and reserved. I feel as though something is trying to bring me back that it's evil and hated me for surviving. These feelings have not gone away and are increasing. I AM NOT SUICIDAL THOUGH. In fact I am fighting for my life.

While Ellie experienced a big change in her life, Ryan questioned his beliefs about life and death and was wondering if everything was predetermined. Remembering the experience still brings a lot of discomfort.

Ryan: The Nurses over the next 2 weeks 'enjoyed' hearing my experience and gave me as much comfort as they possibly could. The little girl's voice still echoes through my head as I picture being back in that horrific place. I sometimes wonder if I have endured a lifetime of pain just to die and be delivered to a plane designed for more pain? That little Angel knew my name. I ask myself why? Is it already written? I guess only time will give me that answer.

This master theme shows how difficult it was for the participants to process their experience afterwards. It seemed important for them to be able to tell others about their NDE, and they tried to make their voice heard, but received negative response. This may have contributed to more questions about why they had an NDE because there was no one to acknowledge their experience and their feelings. Many struggled

to get rid of their negative emotions on their own and not having any support or strategies on how to deal with their NDE could possibly have led them to feel very alone.

## Discussion

The results show that a distressing NDE includes features such as an experience of a void or hell, distressing feelings, positive, and/or negative aftereffects, as well as a sense of questioning your own worth, a feeling of wanting to be saved, or a feeling of rejection when having a distressing NDE. Experiencers also reported contrasting feelings or descriptions. The narratives suggest that there can be differing levels of sense of control during an NDE and there can be hybrid experiences, in which one participant has both positive and distressing features.

Our participants reported experiencing distressing feelings such as fear, panic, shock, and despair. Although we did not specifically look for the previously described categories of distressing NDEs our results shows that participants had experiences that are similar to previous research about inverted experiences, void, and hellish experiences (Atwater, 1992, 1994; Bush, 2012; Cassol et al., 2019b; Grey, 1985; Greyson & Bush, 1992; Lindley et al., 1981).

Participants expressed that they had had a gut feeling that they should not be experiencing their NDE or experiencing it too soon. This is common when having an inverted NDE. They do not know why they are having an NDE and are confused about what is happening, similarly to what previous research has shown (Bush, 2012; Ring, 1984; Sabom, 1982). As in previous descriptions of void experiences, participants reported feeling trapped and struggling in the darkness. Another thing that confused two of our participants is that they experienced being able to communicate telepathically with beings in their NDEs. Research (e.g., Greyson et al., 2009) shows that reported telepathic communication with other beings can be a feature of an NDE but is rarely mentioned.

During hellish experiences some of our participants observed the torment and suffering of others, while others also suffered themselves. Our results show that while experiencing a hellish NDE is frightening on its own, there might also be a fear of the fear itself. Having an NDE can be terrifying and frightening since it is usually an unknown situation that can make someone anxious. For some, trusting their own ability to handle any situation and the unknown can aid in reacting and coping with the NDE (Bush, 2012). Our results support that the unknown aspect of the experience can be terrifying, with or without having a hellish experience.

In exploring what it is like to have a distressing NDE we realized that some of our



stories were hybrid experiences that include both positive and distressing features and usually start out distressing and then turn positive (see also Bush, 2012; Sabom, 1982). About half of our participants reported contrasting descriptions of their NDE where they experienced both positive and negative emotions. Therefore, our results show that distressing experiences may not only be distressing but also positive in some sense. Our results make us wonder whether hybrid experiences are more common than we might think and whether we tend to primarily focus on either positive or distressing features of NDEs and miss out the nuances of hybrid experiences.

Preceding research has shown that traumatic events and anomalous experiences can make the world feel chaotic, hard to understand, and control for those experiencing it (Irwin, 2000). When looking at our findings, we have considered whether sense of control could affect the outcome of an NDE and/or its aftereffects. Rotter (1966) defined those who perceive an outcome as due to their own actions or personal characteristics as having an internal locus of control. In contrast, having an external locus of control refers to individuals who think that outcomes are influenced and determined by forces beyond their control. Could it be that internal and external locus of control affect NDEs? Could there be something special about NDEs that makes them harder to control than other experiences?

People experiencing a distressing NDE may also ask themselves why they are experiencing it and question what they have done to deserve being in an unpleasant experience. Bush (2012) briefly mentioned that people seem to question their own value when it comes to painful experiences, especially in the eyes of God. Out of eight, three participants described intense fear of judgment of not being seen as worthy in the eyes of God and thus not going to heaven. Some of them reflected on their past actions and attributed the unpleasant parts of their NDE to punishment or atonement for their sins. We do not know whether the level of self-blame of our participants was affected by the degree of belief in the Day of Judgment or not. However, there seems to be something about the unknown that makes NDErs question themselves in the process. For others who experienced a dark or hellish experience, this belief might have been reinforced.

Bush (2002) has previously discussed that one's mental status and past actions do not affect how distressing or positive one's NDE is. Despite this claim, our participants seem to reason that their previous mental state, beliefs, or actions affected the course of their NDE. Some of our participants felt rejected, forsaken, or abandoned by God or other beings during and after their distressing NDE. Having a distressing NDE might have confirmed their beliefs that they are a bad person and therefore deserve a more distressing experience. It is not uncommon to feel a lasting sense of empti-

ness after a distressing experience. Our results also show that participants can feel a changed worldview after their NDE and question their beliefs about life, God, and the afterlife. Some may blame themselves when they experienced a distressing NDE, since positive NDEs seem to be more common and pleasant.

The findings of this study show that after a distressing NDE participants can have both positive and negative aftereffects, but mostly negative. Previous research has shown that a distressing NDE can cause long-lasting emotional trauma, increased vulnerability, and relational issues (Bush, 2012; Greyson, 2001). Our participants reported increased relational problems and increased anxiety and other negative emotions. About a third of our participants also indicated that they could not stop thinking about the experience afterwards and felt haunted by it. In contrast, there were also those who reported positive aftereffects. About a third of our participants experienced positive emotions after their NDE and felt more open, hopeful, and positive. It seemed that they expressed an increased appreciation of life in general and felt motivated to live their lives in a better way, similar to a recent qualitative study with 4 interviewees who reported an increased sense of meaning in life (Zingmark & Granberg-Axèll, 2023). We cannot say what made some people have negative and others positive aftereffects after their experience. One participant even had both positive and negative aftereffects, showing that it is possible to have both.

Regardless of the content of one's NDE, our results seem to show that many found it challenging to share their experience. The first step to process the distressing experience is to talk about it. NDErs often, however, do not dare to talk about their experience to others and therefore risk developing psychological and social problems. Our participants had tried to share the experience with their family members, friends, or health-care professionals but received negative feedback, were ignored, or told to keep quiet to avoid being locked up in a mental institution. That might have been prevented if the NDE had not been stigmatized. An NDE does not fit most people's worldview and might be difficult to believe.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Our preconceptions about distressing NDEs might have influenced our selection and interpretation of the data. Even if the participants categorized their NDE or parts of it as frightening, we do not know which parts or whether it was the whole experience that was frightening. To counteract this limitation, we strived to have a structured and systematic selection and analysis, and independent evaluation. We also considered reflexivity throughout the analyzing and writing process.



An important limitation of our study is that the narratives database consists of those who wanted to send their reports and share their NDE. This might be a biased group and unrepresentative of all who experience distressing NDEs. There is also the fact that we could not control what questions were answered and how. Our narratives thus differed in length and thickness, which led to some participants being highlighted more often than others in the results section. Another limitation is that the participants were not specifically asked to describe their aftereffects in their narratives, which means that only six out of eight participants described them. A similar study to ours but with a larger database, like that in [nderf.org](http://nderf.org) can evaluate the representativeness of our findings.

A strength of our study is that we are the first to use IPA to study distressing NDEs in a qualitative systematic way. We had a small number of participants, which is a limitation, but used IPA to make detailed analyses rather than draw general conclusions, which may make the smaller number of participants advantageous. Distressing NDE accounts are not always easy to come by no matter which method you use. A strength of our study is that we were able to analyze eight narratives with distressing NDEs, instead of basing our study just on single cases. Our selection of narratives was systematic to include every person who fulfilled the criteria for a distressing NDE. This allowed us to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the different near-death experiences, which we would not have obtained through single cases. Another strength is that we considered internal validity and reliability for qualitative research by doing independent analyses as well as comparing them. We aimed to ensure that the analyses are credible and consistent with data (Smith, 1996; Yardley, 2008).

A limitation in terms of data collection and implementation of IPA is that we were not able to conduct interviews with the participants. Interviews could have led to a thicker description of their experience, but our narratives had a varying degree of thick descriptions. The fact that we were not able to conduct interviews might have resulted in the unevenness between the participants. By not conducting interviews we were also not able to evaluate the participants' body language, tone, and gestures, which Murray and Holmes (2014) describes as important factors in the collection of data in IPA.

Although we did not use interviews to gather our data, we partly compensated for this limitation by using narratives where participants described their experience. Similarly to written narratives, diary entries have also been used in phenomenological research. Using diaries for phenomenological research can provide an insight into a phenomenon without the risk of questions that might alter the description of the experience, also a risk during interviews (Alaszewski, 2006; Morrell-Scott, 2018). Using diaries can offer in-depth information and reflections about the experiences (Cudjoe,



2022). We did not use diaries but narratives written by the participants who did not know what the research questions would be.

When studying anomalous experiences all methods have their strengths and weaknesses (Cardeña & Pekala, 2014). The difference between using diaries and narratives might be that you tend to write down your experience in a diary daily or close to after the event happened, while a narrative might be written years after your experience. Therefore, there might be a risk that the passage of time affects how the NDEs were remembered in our study. Some of our participants experienced their NDE several years before, which may lead to potential bias and affect how detailed the memory was described in the narratives. Nonetheless, Greyson and Bush (1992) have discussed how accounts of NDE were very similar even after being recounted years later.

By highlighting those who have experienced distressing and/or hybrid NDEs, our study contributes to a more nuanced picture and should reduce the stigma around what an NDE can include. It is not a positive experience filled with love and light for everyone. Through a qualitative approach, we have gained a deeper understanding of how a distressing NDE can negatively affect NDErs' mental health. This understanding can help inform people, especially healthcare professionals, in supporting those who have experienced an NDE. Experiencing a distressing NDE may lead to an increased risk of developing trauma or other psychological symptoms, which is why healthcare professionals need to develop interventions that can help NDErs to process their experience afterwards. Being open, understanding and non-judgmental are keys to success.

Our results show that distressing experiences come in many different forms. Our participants experienced distressing emotions, especially fear, during their NDEs, but also some had hybrid experiences, with both positive and distressing elements. After-effects reported by our participants included an increase in negative emotions and not being believed by others when talking about their NDE. Some also experienced positive aftereffects despite having a distressing experience. These features are similar to patterns identified in previous research, but not described in their own words and with more detailed examples as in the current study.

In addition to supporting previous research, our study has revealed new aspects, including speculation about the link between locus of control and the NDE, the experience of feeling judged/abandoned by God, and the increase in negative emotions as aftereffects after a distressing NDE. Future research should focus on exploring hybrid and distressing NDEs and their eventual differences or similarities to positive experiences. It would also be interesting to see research properly studying locus of control and NDEs. A more important and neglected area has been to compare NDE, posi-

tive or negative, with other alterations of consciousness. Just to give an example of what seem to be close parallels, in a study with highly hypnotizable people, there were reports of great darkness and void, with 10 out of 12 participants reporting positive imagery experiences, but the two with the highest scores in dissociation and lowest scores in ego strength having negative imagery (Cardeña, 2005). Similar comparisons could be made between positive and negative reactions to meditation practice or other forms of consciousness alteration.

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## La Phénoménologie des Expériences Angoissantes de Mort Imminente et de leurs Séquelles

Amal Ait Melloul Karolina Kinnunen Etzel Cardeña

**Résumé.** *Objectif:* Explorer ce qu'est une expérience de mort imminente (EMI) angoissante et les séquelles qui s'ensuivent. *Méthode :* Nous avons consulté tous les récits de NDE pénibles dans la base de données de l'International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) et analysé huit récits individuels à l'aide de l'Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). *Résultats:* Les NDE éprouvantes comportaient des caractéristiques telles que des sentiments troublants, des expériences d'obscurité et des images effrayantes sous différentes formes. Des difficultés émotionnelles et sociales ont été rencontrées dans la gestion de la NDE après coup. Des effets secondaires tels que des réactions négatives lorsqu'on parle de l'expérience et des émotions exacerbées ont été rapportés. Nous avons trouvé des expériences hybrides, où l'expérience pénible présentait à la fois des caractéristiques positives et négatives. *Conclusion:* Les recherches futures sur les NDE devraient se concentrer sur les expériences hybrides et utiliser des méthodes mixtes et des recherches plus qualitatives en général.

French translation by Antoine Bioy, Ph. D.

## Die Phänomenologie belastender Nahtoderfahrungen und ihrer Nachwirkungen

Amal Ait Melloul Karolina Kinnunen Etzel Cardeña

**Zusammenfassung.** *Zielsetzung:* Es soll erforscht werden, wie es ist, eine verstörende Nahtoderfahrung (NTE) zu haben, und welche Nachwirkungen sich daraus ergeben. *Methode:* Wir griffen auf alle Berichte über

belastenden Nahtoderfahrungen in der Datenbank der International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) zu und analysierten acht Einzelberichte mit Hilfe der Interpretativen Phänomenologischen Analyse (IPA). *Ergebnisse:* Belastende NTEs enthielten Merkmale wie beunruhigende Gefühle und Erfahrungen von Dunkelheit und beängstigende Bilder in verschiedenen Formen. Es gab sowohl emotionale als auch soziale Schwierigkeiten im Umgang mit der Nahtoderfahrung hinterher. Es wurde über Nachwirkungen wie negative Rückmeldungen beim Sprechen über die Erfahrung und erhöhte Emotionen berichtet. Wir fanden gemischte Erfahrungen, wenn die belastende Erfahrung sowohl positive als auch negative Merkmale aufwies. *Schlussfolgerung:* Künftige Forschungen über Nahtoderfahrungen sollten sich auf gemischte Erfahrungen konzentrieren und generell mehr qualitative Forschung betreiben.

German translation by Eberhard Bauer, Ph. D.

## A Fenomenologia das Experiências de Quase-Morte Angustiantes e Seus Impactos

Amal Ait Melloul Karolina Kinnunen Etzel Cardeña

**Resumo.** *Objetivo:* Explorar como é ter uma experiência de quase-morte (EQM) perturbadora e seus efeitos posteriores. *Método:* Acessamos todas as narrativas de EQMs angustiantes presentes no banco de dados da International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) e analisamos oito narrativas individuais usando a Análise Fenomenológica Interpretativo (IPA). *Resultados:* EQMs angustiantes incluíram características como sentimentos perturbadores e experiências de escuridão e imagens assustadoras de diferentes formas. Houve dificuldades emocionais e sociais posteriores para se lidar com a EQM. Efeitos subsequentes, como receber feedback negativo ao falar sobre a experiência e emoções intensificadas, foram relatados. Encontramos experiências híbridas, onde a experiência angustiante tinha características tanto positivas quanto negativas. *Conclusão:* Pesquisas futuras sobre EQMs deveriam focar experiências híbridas e empregar métodos mistos, bem como mais pesquisas qualitativas em geral.

Portuguese translation by Antônio Lima, Ph. D.

## La Fenomenología de las Experiencias Cercanas a la Muerte Angustiosas y sus Secuelas

Amal Ait Melloul Karolina Kinnunen Etzel Cardeña

**Resumen.** *Objetivo:* Explorar la naturaleza de las experiencias cercanas a la muerte (NDE) angustiosa y sus secuelas. *Método:* Tuvimos acceso a todos los relatos de NDE angustiosas de la base de datos de la International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) y analizamos ocho relatos individuales con un Análisis Fenomenológico Interpretativo (IPA). *Resultados:* Las NDE angustiosas incluyeron sentimientos per-



turbadores y experiencias de oscuridad e imágenes aterradoras de distintos tipos. Los participantes tuvieron dificultades tanto emocionales como sociales para afrontar las NDE después y mencionaron efectos secundarios como recibir comentarios negativos al hablar de la experiencia y sus emociones intensas. Encontramos experiencias híbridas, en las que la experiencia angustiosa tenía características tanto positivas como negativas. *Conclusiones:* La investigación futura sobre NDE debería centrarse en las experiencias híbridas y emplear métodos mixtos y más investigación cualitativa en general.

Spanish translation by Etzel Cardeña, Ph. D.