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THE EVERYDAY ALWAYS-THERENESS

of

Living with Rheumatoid Arthritis

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the phenomenon of 'living with rheumatoid arthritis'. Utilising a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology informed by the writings of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, the study provides an understanding of the meaning the phenomenon has for the participants and illustrates the impact it has had on their lives.

The participants in the study were twenty-five people who have varying experiences of the phenomenon. Eleven participants were people who have the disease, six were partners of people who have rheumatoid arthritis, and eight were adult-aged children whose mother or father has the disease. Drawing primarily on the stories shared by the participants, the study uncovers the everyday realities of living with rheumatoid arthritis and it reveals the taken-for-granted nature of the experience. The interpretation offered in the thesis raises new understandings of the complex phenomenon of 'living with rheumatoid arthritis'.

The findings of this thesis show that rheumatoid arthritis is always there in the lives of those who experience the phenomenon, whether as partners, adult children, or the person with the disease. In its always-thereness rheumatoid arthritis becomes part of the background familiarity of their lives. Those who live with rheumatoid arthritis take the experience with them into all other worlds. It permeates, to varying degrees, all aspects of their lives. In the presence of rheumatoid arthritis different things matter and things matter differently. Living with rheumatoid arthritis means finding a new way of being-in-the-world. It means developing and maintaining strategies for being-in-the-world with rheumatoid arthritis. As the strategies are developed, these people come to live in the world in an everyday way that in itself becomes taken-for-granted. They, as I suggest, come to live resolutely with the disease. However, living resolutely with rheumatoid arthritis is always tenuous and at the beck and call of the disease and a myriad of other influences. Resoluteness in the everydayness of living with rheumatoid arthritis can be lost at any time, in any way. Living with rheumatoid arthritis becomes a cycle of always working towards and maintaining the everydayness of resolute coping, while knowing it may be lost at any moment, which will necessitate coming again to pick up the strategies that bring one back to a taken-for-granted everydayness.

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