

CHAPTER 2

Research design and methodology

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology in detail.

2.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

In order to develop guidelines to facilitate an understanding of HIV/AIDS, the researcher needed to explore and describe the perceptions of HIV/AIDS of clients attending a community clinic in the Mutale area in Limpopo Province.

2.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to

- explore and describe the perceptions of HIV/AIDS of clients attending a community clinic in Mutale area in Limpopo Province
- develop guidelines to facilitate an understanding of HIV/AIDS by clients

2.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design was qualitative, exploratory, descriptive and contextual.

2.4.1 Qualitative

A qualitative approach aims at collecting data in a naturalistic setting; documenting real events, recording what people say in words, gestures and tones, observation of specific behaviour and all the concrete aspects of the world (Neuman 1997:328).

In this study the researcher knew little about the perceptions of HIV/AIDS of clients attending a community clinic, therefore the qualitative approach was used to obtain more information.

2.4.2 Explorative

Explorative studies are aimed at exploring dimensions of a phenomenon, how the phenomenon manifests itself and other related factors (Brink 1996:11). The perceptions of HIV/AIDS of clients attending a community clinic were explored.

2.4.3 Descriptive

A descriptive design is aimed at “obtaining complete accurate information about a phenomenon through observation, description and classification” (Brink 1996:11).

In this study the researcher adopted a descriptive approach in order to obtain complete and accurate information from clients attending the clinic. The respondents’ perceptions were observed, described and classified. From this, guidelines to facilitate understanding of HIV/AIDS were developed.

2.4.4 Contextual

Neuman (1997:33) states that in qualitative research, “the meaning of social action depends on the context in which it appears”.

The respondents' perceptions were explored in a social context. The social context of this study was the rural area of the Vhembe district in the Mutale area of Limpopo Province.

2.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this study the researcher obtained information from people therefore she had to ensure their protection. For this reason, the researcher adhered to the following ethical principles.

2.5.1 Permission to conduct a study

The researcher wrote a letter for approval to the regional office for permission to conduct the study. The researcher also obtained permission from each respondent in the form of informed consent.

2.5.2 Voluntary informed consent

The respondents were given adequate information about the study and the free choice to voluntarily consent to participate or not. The researcher prepared consent forms for them to sign.

The purpose of the study, procedures to be used, possible pain, discomfort, stress and loss of dignity that accompany the research process were discussed with the respondents.

2.5.3 Privacy

The researcher ensured that the respondents' privacy was protected throughout the process. Privacy was assured through anonymity and confidentiality.

2.5.4 Anonymity

Names and addresses did not appear anywhere in the study. Each participant was provided with a number or code name. They were asked to generate their own identification code, if possible.

2.5.5 Confidentiality

Confidentiality refers to the researcher's ability to keep data protected. Participants were assured that any information provided would not be published or reported in a manner that identified them.

2.5.6 Protection from harm and discomfort

Participants have the right not to be harmed physically or psychologically. The researcher did not probe information that would harm the participants, but left the question to a later stage.

The researcher was not judgmental towards the participants but took what was said as the truth. The participants were told that they had the right to refuse to participate without any penalty, and could withdraw from the study at any time should they so wish.

2.6 RESEARCH METHODS

The researcher explored and described the perceptions of HIV/AIDS of clients attending a community clinic in the Mutale area in Limpopo Province.

Based on the data the researcher developed guidelines to facilitate an understanding of HIV/AIDS by clients.

2.6.1 Population

Population is a term that “sets boundaries on the study units. It is the totality of person; events, organisation units with the research problem concerned” (De Vos 1994:190). In this study, the population consisted of HIV/AIDS patients who attended a community clinic in the Mutale area in Limpopo Province.

2.6.2 Sampling

Sampling is “the process of selecting a portion of a population to represent the entire population” (Polit & Hungler 1995:625). Purposive sampling was used in this study, which is a sampling method “based on the judgement of the researcher regarding subjects or objects that are typical or representative of the phenomenon being studied or who are knowledgeable about the question at issue” (Brink 19996:141).

The researcher’s inclusion criteria for the sample were as follows:

- The respondents could be male or female, aged between 20 and 60 years.
- Participation had to be voluntary and informed consent obtained.
- They had to be clients attending a community clinic and had to live in the Mutale area in Limpopo Province.
- They had to be able to understand and speak English, to accommodate the researcher’s supervisor.

2.6.3 Sample size

In this study, the sample consisted of fourteen (14) respondents. Data was collected until saturation was reached and no new information was given (Brink 1996:141).

2.6.4 Data collection

Data was collected through phenomenological semi-structured interviews, observation and field notes. Phenomenological interviews examine “lived experiences through the descriptions provided by the people involved” (Brink 1996:119). The researcher asked a number of specific questions in the interviews, with additional probes to get clarity. Open-ended questions were asked (Brink 1996:158). The interviews were tape-recorded with the respondents’ permission.

The researcher observed and recorded respondents' reactions and behaviour during the interviews. Field notes were also made to help the researcher remember events as they occurred.

During the interviews the researcher used the communication skills and techniques of probing, reflecting, paraphrasing, clarifying and minimal responding to collect data.

Probing. According to Mashele (2003:24), the objective of research is to collect reliable information. It is important to evaluate respondents' responses continuously. Researchers should stimulate respondents through probing to provide additional information and, where there are vague answers, give further particulars. The researcher also used active listening, silence, empathy questioning, general lead, restating, clarification and focusing.

Reflecting. This refers to communicating with the respondents and understanding their concerns and perspectives. The researcher reflected on stated or implied feelings, what had been observed non-verbally.

Paraphrasing. Okun (1992) (cited in Mashele 2003:25) describes a paraphrase as a verbal statement that is "interchangeable with the respondent's statement, although words may be synonymous with the response used".

Clarifying. This is an attempt to focus on or understand the basic nature of the respondent's statement.

Minimal responding. Minimal responding means that the interviewer adopts a less active role and gives the respondent more time to talk.

2.6.5 Data analysis

Cresswell (1994:153) states that data analysis is conducted simultaneously with data collection. In this study, data was analysed using an open coding system to reduce the

information to themes or categories. Tesch's (1990) eight-step model (in Creswell 1994:154) was used for data analysis:

- Get a sense of the whole. Read through all the transcriptions carefully jotting down ideas as they come to mind.
- Pick one document. Pick one interesting and short interview or the one on the top, go through it and write your thoughts in the margin.
- Complete the task. After completing the task for several participants, make a list of all topics and cluster similar topics together, arrange these topics in columns.
- Take the list and abbreviate the topics as codes. Write the codes next to the appropriate segments.
- Group topics that relate to each other together.
- Decide on abbreviations for each category and alphabetise them as codes.
- Assemble data material belonging to each category and make a preliminary analysis.
- Record the existing data.

2.6.6 Literature control

According to Burns and Grove (1999:711), findings from a phenomenological study are compared and combined with the literature to determine the current knowledge of the phenomenon. The researcher discussed the results of this study with reference to the literature review.

2.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS

The researcher used Lincoln and Guba's (1985) (Polit & Hungler 1995:326) model to ensure trustworthiness. The model is based on four criteria of ensuring trustworthy namely truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality.

2.7.1 Truth-value

Truth-value asks whether the researcher has established confidence in the truth of the findings of a particular inquiry (Polit & Hungler 1995:326).

The researcher remained in the field for a long time interacting with the participants. The researcher wrote everything said by the participants in the field notes including everything observed. The researcher's peer also reviewed the collected data to ensure credibility.

It is important that researchers produce credible findings and interpretations. Lincoln and Guba (1985:301-314) identify six techniques that can be used to ensure the credibility of findings:

- *Prolonged engagement.* This means that the researcher needed to spend sufficient time to achieve the purposes. The researcher used some of the communication skills like the use of "silence" to allow the respondent time to think before he/she actually responded.
- *Persistent observation.* The purpose of persistent observation is to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation most relevant to the problem or issue being under study and focus on them in detail.
- *Triangulation.* Triangulation is a technique using several methods or means together. The researcher conducted an in-depth interview, while simultaneously using a tape recorder, persistent observation and taking field notes.
- *Flexibility.* The researcher used this technique using a tape recorder and taking field notes.
- *Member checks.* Member checks took place when data, analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions were tested with members from whom the data was originally collected.
- *Peer debriefing.* For the sake of credibility, the researcher was exposed to searching questions by an experienced protagonist, doing her best to be the devil's advocate
- *Structural coherence.* In this study the researcher only focused on the respondents' perceptions of HIV/AIDS.

2.7.2 Applicability

Applicability refers to the extent to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other participants (Polit & Hungler 1995:3620). The researcher used the strategy of transferability to ensure applicability (Lincoln & Guba 1985:297).

The researcher ensured transferability by selecting the sample, which represented the entire population of the study. The researcher described what the respondents said.

2.7.3 Consistency

Consistency asks how researchers determine whether the findings of an enquiry would be repeated if the enquiry were replicated with the same participants in the same context.

Dependability was used to ensure consistency. The researcher used the exact method of data gathering, analysis and interpretation. Code-recode procedure that is after coding the data, the researcher waited for two weeks and returned and recorded the same data and compared the results.

2.7.4 Neutrality

Neutrality asks how researchers can establish the degree to which the respondents determine the findings in an enquiry.

The researcher used conformability to ensure neutrality. The researcher discussed the findings with a peer, who had knowledge and experience of qualitative research, until agreement (consensus) was reached.

2.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter described the research design, data-collection method and analysis as well as trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Chapter 3 deals with the research methodology.