Chapter 3: The Study

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the rationale and aims of the study as well as the research questions and the research methods employed in the study. The sample, measures, procedure, analysis and research design are described.

3.2 Rationale for the study

The present study is deemed necessary due to the fact that there are few bereavement programmes for children within the South African context, despite the fact that there has been an increase in the number of children who are experiencing grief. There appears to be a gap in the research in South Africa, particularly in relation to research in the African child’s understanding of death and their grief reactions. Most of the literature surveyed focuses on children in America or Europe and there are few studies on children’s response to loss in the local South African or African context.

The number of children affected by the death of a parent in South Africa has risen due to increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS deaths and deaths due to violence (Worden & Silverman, 1996). The need to counsel children affected by such deaths may exceed the capacity of trained counsellors in Southern Africa. In 2003, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) embarked on a campaign to train lay counsellors in South Africa. The reason for this campaign is because of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which is ever increasing in both rural and urban communities, that results in the increased need for the training of lay counsellors to assist with HIV/AIDS counselling and bereavement counselling for all those affected by the pandemic (Isaacs, 2003). Therefore, it is important to equip everyone who is willing and able with the necessary skills to be effective counsellors. (Van Dyk, 2001). By training lay counsellors to work within their own communities, professionals will be responding effectively to the needs of those in the communities that they

3.3 Research Context: The Community Centre

The Community Centre from which the volunteers are drawn is situated in Daveyton, a township in Benoni on the East Rand. The centre serves the people of a smaller section of the larger township. A donor from Australia, as well as a local church in the Benoni area, funds the Community Centre. A committee that includes members of the local community as well as ministers and members of a nearby church manages the centre. There is a supervisor at the centre who manages and facilitates the projects at the centre. This is a full-time, paid position filled by a member of the local community. The community centre is open on weekdays from 8am to 5pm.

Projects at the centre include a preschool, sewing classes, brick making lessons, Basic Computer Skills training and an after-school centre for young children. The preschool offers basic education for the local children. Approximately 80 children attend the preschool which has three classrooms, and four qualified teachers who are assisted by two women from the local community. The sewing school teaches women how to sew. The women are encouraged to sell the articles that they have made in a small shop which is on the premises of the Community Centre. The local women retain the majority of the proceeds from the sales of these items, however, a small percentage of these proceeds goes to the Community Centre to further fund the project. There are currently 15 women enrolled in the sewing classes. The Community Centre also offers unemployed men from the township the opportunity to learn to make bricks. The men can either use the bricks themselves to build houses etc, or they can sell the bricks. Again, a small percentage of the proceeds from the sales of the bricks are retained by the centre to fund this on-going project. At present there are 12 men who are learning to make bricks. There is a computer laboratory at the centre that is available to train adults and adolescents in Basic Computer Skills. The laboratory has six computers that were donated and are maintained by members of the nearby church.
After school, children from the nearby primary school are provided with soup and bread, and they can also partake in various activities such as soccer or dance classes. The Community Centre currently caters for on average 70 children every weekday afternoon. A number of young adults from the local community help with the supervision of these children and are involved in the facilitation of the various activities. The young adults who supervise children at the centre have all participated in a Basic Counselling Skills course. A psychologist who is a member of the nearby church provided the training. The lay counsellors training course consisted of six sessions and the duration of each session was approximately two hours. The psychologist offers weekly supervision to these young adults. These young people, or lay counsellors offer counselling services to the children and youth of the local community.

3.4 The aim of the study

3.4.1 General Aim

To evaluate a bereavement training programme for volunteers at a Community Centre in Daveyton.

3.4.2 Specific aims

(1) To evaluate volunteer capabilities in the field of bereavement counselling for children following the training programme.
(2) To explore the outcomes of the training programme.
(3) To investigate the modifications to the training programme.

3.4.3 The research questions

(1) What are the volunteers’ baseline competencies in understanding children’s perceptions of death and the grieving processes of children prior to the training programme?
(2) Has there been a change in the volunteers’ understanding of children’s perceptions of death and the grieving processes of children following
the training programme?

(3) What does the thematic analysis of the volunteers’ pre- and post-training responses reveal about the development in their understanding of children’s perceptions of death?

(4) What modifications need to be made to the current bereavement training programme?

3.5 Method

3.5.1 The sample

Ten of the young adults that underwent the Basic Counselling Skills training volunteered to participate in the present study. Although they could be referred to as lay counsellors, for the purposes of this study, they will be referred to as volunteers in this report. The volunteers are described individually and their reasons for wanting to participate in the research project are described.

Volunteer 1 is a 20-year-old male. His home language is Zulu and he describes his proficiency in English to be good. He has completed Grade 10. He became a volunteer at the centre because he felt that he wanted to make a difference in the community and he would like to work with AIDS orphans. He would also like to help these children (AIDS orphans) to cope with the death of a loved one because he knows that it is an experience that is difficult to deal with.

Volunteer 2 is a 22-year-old female. Her home language is Zulu and she feels that her competency in English is average. She has completed her Matriculation certificate and has also done a Basic Computer Skills course. She became a volunteer at the centre because she is interested in counselling and would like to work with children and AIDS orphans.

Volunteer 3 is a 21-year-old male. His home languages are Zulu and Southern Sotho and he describes his ability to communicate in English as average. He has completed Grade 11. He became a volunteer because he
wanted to use his spare time more constructively. He also hoped to help younger children deal with death in the family as well as help them deal with stressful situations.

**Volunteer 4** is a 21-year-old female. Her home language is Zulu and she describes her English ability as average. She has completed her Matriculation Certificate. She became a volunteer because she loves children and would like to work with them, particularly AIDS orphans.

**Volunteer 5** is a 25-year-old male. His home language is Zulu and he describes his competency in English as good. He has completed Grade 11 and has a certificate in Theology. He became a volunteer at the centre because of his passion for children who are suffering the loss of a parent because of HIV/AIDS.

**Volunteer 6** is a 22-year-old male. His home language is Zulu and he rates his ability to communicate in English as average. Volunteer 6 has completed his Matriculation Certificate. He became a volunteer to learn bereavement skills and would like to share what he knows with others.

**Volunteer 7** is a 24-year-old female. Her home language is Southern Sotho and she says that she has a good grasp of the English language. She has completed her Matriculation Certificate and has also done a Diploma in Travel and Tourism. She became a volunteer at the centre because she would like to help those in need, especially children.

**Volunteer 8** is a 21-year-old male. His home language is Zulu and he describes his competency in English as being average. He has completed his Matriculation certificate and has also done a Basic Computer Skills course at Boston City Campus. He became a volunteer because he would like to help people and make a contribution to the community. He would also like to develop new skills in the area of child bereavement counselling.
Volunteer 9 is a 24-year-old male. His home language is Zulu and describes as average his competency in English. He completed Grade 11 and has work experience as an electrician. He became a volunteer to help other people in particular, children in grief.

Volunteer 10 is a 23-year-old female. Her home language is Southern Sotho and says that she has a good ability to speak and understand English. She has completed Grade 11. She became a volunteer at the centre to help her develop bereavement skills so that she can help the people in her community.

3.5.2 Measures

The measurement instruments included:
Biographical Questionnaire (See Appendix A)
Initial Guided Interview (See Appendix B)
First Case Example (See Appendix C)
Follow-up guided interview (See Appendix B)
Second Case Example (See Appendix D)

3.5.2 (i) Pre-training measures

a. Biographical Questionnaire
The Biographical Questionnaire was designed by the researcher and was completed by the volunteers. This questionnaire is used to establish the background information of the volunteers (See Appendix A).

b. The Initial Guided Interview
The Initial Guided Interview is an informal measure designed by the researcher to establish the volunteers' understanding and explanation of the death process including their understanding of children's perception of death, children's grief reactions and working with children in groups (See Appendix B).
c. The Case Example
The Case Example is an informal measure designed by the writer to further establish what understanding the volunteers have of children’s understanding and perceptions of death before the training programme (See Appendix C). The case study consists of a short vignette highlighting children’s understanding of death and their reactions to the death of a loved one. A set of questions relating to these issues follows the Case Example.

3.5.2 (ii) Post-training measures

a. The Interview
The follow-up Guided Interview is the same as the Initial Guided interview and is administered to the volunteers after the training programme. The measure is used to establish if there have been any changes in the volunteers understanding of the processes of death after the training (See Appendix B).

b. The Second Case Example
The second Case Example is similar to the first one and is administered to the volunteers after the intervention programme. Again the reason for this measure is to establish whether there are any changes in the volunteers’ knowledge and understanding of children’s perception of death and their grief reactions. (See Appendix D).

3.6 Procedure

3.6.1 Permission for the research
A discussion with the supervisor of the Community Centre about the aims and rationale of the study yielded his permission to carry out the research programme. The supervisor called for volunteers and a meeting with the ten counsellors who volunteered for the project, was arranged. The researcher met with the volunteers and they were informed of the aims and rationale of the study. This meeting allowed for interaction between the researcher and the volunteers wherein the volunteers queries and concerns could be raised
and addressed. At the conclusion of this first meeting, a follow-up meeting between the researcher and the volunteers was arranged for the following week. In the week following this initial meeting, volunteers were given time to think about whether or not they would like to participate in the research.

In the second meeting, the aims and rationale of the study were again discussed and any further queries or concerns were addressed. The volunteers were asked if they were willing to participate in the research programme. All of the 10 volunteers were willing to participate and they signed a consent form (See Appendix E). The volunteers were also given the Biographical Questionnaire to complete. All volunteers were assured that they could withdraw from the training programme at any time.

3.6.2 Ethical Considerations

For ethical reasons, the volunteers were guaranteed anonymity during the study. The volunteers were not asked to give their names on the Biographical Questionnaire, but rather were assigned a number. These numbers were then used on all relevant documentation as well as in the report. A further ethical consideration in this study was the use of children in the training programme. At no time were children used in the training of the volunteers.

At the conclusion of this second meeting, times and dates convenient for the researcher and the volunteers for the initial interviews, were negotiated.

3.6.3 Pre-training Research protocol

a. Interviews

Each volunteer was individually interviewed in a private office at the Community Centre. Permission for these interviews to be recorded and transcribed was granted by each of the volunteers (See appendix F). On average, these guided interviews lasted 45 minutes. The interviews were transcribed, and the volunteers were then later asked to read through the transcriptions for accuracy.
The time and date for a further meeting between the volunteers and the researcher was negotiated.

**b. Case Example**

At this meeting, the volunteers were asked to complete the first Case Example. As a group, the volunteers and researcher read through the case study to ensure that everyone understood the task and the Case Example. Following this, the volunteers answered the questions related to the Case Example individually. Time was allocated to allow the researcher to discuss the Case Example with each volunteer. This was done to ensure clarity of answers.

At the conclusion of this meeting, times and dates for the training programme were again negotiated and agreed upon. The volunteers were also asked if they had any specific needs or requests with regards to the training. It was discovered that the volunteers would need stationery such as books, pens and pencils. The researcher and the Community Centre then provided this for them.

**3.6.4. The Training Programme**

The training programme was then implemented for a period of eight (8) weeks. Each session was two hours in duration. These sessions were on consecutive Friday afternoons at the request of the volunteers.

In the first two sessions, the volunteers were required to attend a series of lectures on: grief, mourning, complicated grief, the stages of grief, normal grief reactions, children’s understanding of death and group work with children. The lectures were interactive and discussion was encouraged. The volunteers were requested to read up on children and bereavement and report back to the group, they also watched a video on children’s perceptions and understanding of death, looked at slides/transparencies about the effects of
bereavement and were asked to take notes on what they learned.

The first session of the bereavement programme was modelled for the volunteers by the researcher and they were required to observe. The bereavement programme was modelled on a separate group of adult volunteers from the centre. No children were involved in the training exercise. After the first session had been modelled, the volunteers, individually or in pairs, were required to lead one theme or topic.

The themes/topics for each week were as follows:
Week 1: Let’s Pretend (Denial)
Week 2: It’s not my fault (Guilt)
Week 3: Being Angry (Anger/ Rage)
Week 4: Feeling Sad (Depression)
Week 5: You’ll be in my heart (Remembering)
Week 6: I’ll be ok (Acceptance/ Resolution) and a Celebration
(See Appendix G)

Each week began with an icebreaker: some activity to help the adult volunteers settle into the group. This was followed by a discussion and an exercise related to the discussion. These exercises were then put into their workbooks. The workbooks were given back to the adult volunteers in the last week of the programme. At the end of each session a discussion ensued which provided feedback for the consideration for revision of the Bereavement Programme for Children. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

**The bereavement programme**

A psychologist and two Psychology Master’s students, in conjunction with trained lay counsellors from a nearby church, previously developed the bereavement programme. Guidelines for the development of the programme were taken from bereavement research with particular emphasis on the research of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1969). The programme had previously been carried out on three occasions with children who were experiencing
grief. Trained lay counsellors from the nearby church facilitated the programme with white children from the local community. The programme was monitored and supervised by a qualified psychologist.

3.6.5 Post-training Research Protocol

a. Case Example

Following the 8-week training programme, the volunteers were required to complete the second (post) Case Example. The same procedure was followed as for the first Case Example wherein the researcher and volunteers first read through the Case Example to ensure that all the volunteers understood it. The volunteers then answered the questions related to the Case Example individually. The volunteers were then also given the opportunity to discuss the Case Example individually with the researcher. After the Case Example was completed, the researcher and volunteers negotiated times and dates for the follow-up guided interviews.

b. Follow-up guided interviews

The procedure for the follow-up interview was consistent with that of the initial guided interview. The volunteers were interviewed individually in a private office at the Community Centre. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were later transcribed and at a later meeting, the volunteers read through the transcriptions for accuracy.

At the final meeting that the researcher had with the volunteers, the volunteers read the transcripts of their follow-up interviews. Also, the volunteers were thanked greatly for their participation in the study. There was a final opportunity for any outstanding questions to be raised and discussed.
3.7. Research Design

A qualitative research design aims at understanding experience as it is “lived” or “felt” (Sherman & Webb, 1988). Naturalistic researchers believe that gaining knowledge from sources that have “intimate familiarity” with an issue is far better than the objective distancing approach that characterizes quantitative approaches (Haworth, 1984). Therefore, in the current study, a qualitative approach was found to be the appropriate research strategy, since it was the intention of this research study to understand the volunteers’ experience of the training programme.

This qualitative research design was contextual in nature, since it focused on a specific Community Centre, situated in Daveyton, a township in Benoni on the East Rand. The design draws on an inductive process in which themes and categories emerge through analysis of the data collected. In the present study, the interviews with ten volunteers were audio-taped and then transcribed verbatim before analysis could be conducted. Although volunteers in the current study voluntarily took part, they were requested to sign agreement forms for informed consent. The volunteers were ensured of their anonymity.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in an ongoing process that enabled the researcher to explore themes as they emerged. In coding data, the emergent coding approach was used. With emergent coding, categories are established following some preliminary examination of the data (Haney, Russel, Gulek, & Fierros, 1998). Before emergent coding could be conducted, both pre- and post-training Case Examples and interviews from all the participants were read. After careful examination of the data, categories were created. As defined by Weber (1990) and GAO (1996) category refers to groups of words with similar meaning or connotations and which are mutually exclusive and exhaustive.
Common trends in the data were sought. The researcher attached labels to observed recurring themes, an approach commonly known as analyst-constructed categories (Matocha, 1992). In order to increase the validity and reliability of the results, data was analysed by the reading and rereading of Case Examples and interviews, assigning codes to portions of the data and identifying emerging themes (Maxwell, 1992). The data was read and reread by two people and the researcher, to establish common themes. Any discrepancies in the emergent themes were negotiated. This process ends when the reader reaches theoretical saturation, the point at which no new themes are emerging (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Krippendorff (1980) defines content analysis as a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories. The type of content analysis adopted in this study is conceptual analysis. It can be thought of as establishing the existence and, or frequency of concepts that most often appear in the text (Mayring, 2000). The descriptive approach (frequency) was preferred rather than the existence approach because the study seeks to explore the volunteers understanding of childhood bereavement etc., and knowing the number of times these concepts appear in a text, might be indicative of their understanding of these concepts. Descriptive design is characterised by simple frequency counts of objective variables as they appear in the data. The data is then described, organised and finally summarised in order to gain insights into complex social and psychological variables to understand what occurred in the study (Berelson, 1952).

3.9 Limitations of the Research Methodology

As stated previously, the current research utilises qualitative research methods because it seeks to gain insight or understanding of a particular group of individuals (Morse, 1994). As such the results of this study cannot be generalised to the wider population. The researcher is well aware of this limitation and this is addressed in the final chapter.