

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

An exploratory study was conducted to investigate the perceived impact of services rendered by lay counsellors. While research has previously been done on the lay counsellor's perceptions of the interventions, models of interventions and victim support centres, little formal research has been done on the victim's perceptions of the impact of services rendered by lay counsellors in South Africa ("Can Anyone Help", 2004; Eagle, 1998; Frieberg, 2001; Hajiyanis & Robertson, 1999; Hunot, 1998; "More Support", 2004; Potter, 2000). This type of study was therefore done in order to make an introductory enquiry into this reasonably unfamiliar area of research in South Africa and therefore it is exploratory (Durrheim, 1999). The aim of this type of research is to formulate more precise areas of enquiry, which can be investigated by more extensive research in the future (Neuman, 1997). In this study, the aim was therefore to develop a basic understanding of the perceived impact of services rendered by lay counsellors, so that future research could be guided and conducted in a more systematic way. In the same way, questions or issues which arose as a result of this research could further be investigated.

According to Durrheim (1999), qualitative methods are naturalistic, holistic and inductive, which means they consider real life situations in their natural context, attempt to understand complex inter-dependencies and allow immersion into the data to explore important meanings. A qualitative research design was therefore chosen for this study, in order to discover and capture the rich meaning in the data collected. In this way, the subjective interpretations of victims who have experienced services rendered by lay counsellors could be established (Henning, 2004; Neuman, 1997). One of the limitations of doing qualitative research is that replication of a study is very rare and therefore the results of this study cannot be generalized to other settings (Neuman, 1997).

1 Participants

For the purpose of this study, those interviewed will be referred to as participants. Consideration will be given here to the sample size, inclusion criteria and how participants were found.

1.1 Sample

Purposive sampling was used to identify specialized subjects for this in-depth investigation (Neuman, 1997). According to Durrheim (1999), the size of a sample in any study depends on the type of study conducted, although practical constraints may also have an influence. By including specified inclusion criteria, the sample becomes homogenous, which means that there is not much variation within the sample, allowing for a smaller sample size (Durrheim, 1999). Five participants were included in this study, which is considered sufficient in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena being explored. Originally a sample of seven participants was selected from a support centre based in Johannesburg. Two participants had to be excluded however, as one did not fit the age criteria specified, as she was 44 years old, and the other was excluded as the taped interview was inaudible and could therefore not be transcribed.

1.2 Demographic Criteria for inclusion as participants

The participants selected were all White, South African women, aged 20-40 years, in order to control for extraneous factors such as race, gender and developmental aspects as potentially influencing their perceptions. As mentioned, Hajiyanis and Robertson (1999) maintain that the Wits Trauma Intervention Model may not adequately address the needs of the elderly or the developmental stage predominant in adolescents. Participants in this study therefore had to fall within the same life stage of early adulthood, which is between the ages of 20-40 years (Louw, Van Ede & Louw, 1998). Being fluent in English enabled the researcher to more accurately interpret the interviews. According to Kleber and Brom (1992), it is not clear whether gender differences occur in reactions to traumatic incidents. According to various studies done, women are more likely to seek medical interventions, admit to

emotional problems earlier and accept interventions more easily than men. This however does not mean that there is a difference in the way they experience psychological difficulties (Kleber & Brom, 1992; Waites, 1993). Due to the uncertainty of the influence of gender and in order to control for this potential extraneous variable, all the participants in this study were female. Race and gender criteria were also included in order to ensure a more homogenous sample.

1.3 Other Inclusion Criteria

The participants chosen had all been victims of crime and would subsequently have been contacted telephonically by a lay counsellor from the support centre. Participants would then have participated in at least one, but not more than four face-to-face interventions. The participants should, at the time of the interview, no longer have been receiving any form of counselling relating to the traumatic incident, as this may alter their perceptions of interventions received by lay counsellors. The type of crime that the victims experienced was not specified as inclusion criteria in this study for two reasons. Firstly, this would be limiting to the possible number of participants in this study. Secondly, although not all authors agree, there has been some evidence which shows that the way a person responds to a particular incident is determined not by the nature of the incident, but by other factors. These factors include the interpretation or subjective meaning attached to that incident, the victim's reaction to it, their personality, and the social networks or relationships they have as support (Kleber & Brom, 1992; Pilgrim, 2003). Some of these aspects have therefore been considered in this study and will be addressed later on.

1.4 Finding participants

The participants were identified by the support centre coordinator, according to records kept of the counselling sessions held by lay counsellors at the centre. Details of those participants who agreed to take part in the study were then forwarded to the researcher by the centre. This was done in order to minimize selection bias by the researcher and meet essential ethical stipulations. Selection

bias may still have occurred however, due to unintentional selector subjectivity during the process of including, or eliminating subjects or due to the tendency to select more accessible samples (Durrheim, 1999). This has been recognized as a limitation of the study. Due to the use of non-random sampling methods, the validity of the information is limited to this qualitative study and the results cannot accurately be generalized beyond the confines of this setting (Durrheim, 1999).

2 Data collection

The instruments used in this study will be considered, before discussing the procedure used to obtain the data in this study and the time it took to complete the interview process.

2.1 Instruments

A semi-structured interview schedule was constructed by the researcher and used to guide the face-to-face interview process (Appendix B). This method is preferred to structured interviews, as participants are able to speak about their experiences and perceptions without being restricted and have the flexibility of openly expressing their experiences. Both the participants and researcher also have less chance of losing sight of the research problem being investigated (Durrheim, 1999).

The interviews were conducted over a 3 month period, during March to April 2005. The interviews were undertaken 7 to 11 months after the traumatic incident. This time lapse was considered appropriate by the researcher, as the participants may still have had sufficient memory of the intervention and time would have been allowed for them to process the experience. The risk of being re-traumatized by the interview would therefore also have been minimised. The interview began with a broad, open-ended question on the participant's overall perceptions of the intervention. Their experience of the intervention, and whether they perceived the intervention as helpful, hindering or having no effect on their ability to cope after a traumatic incident, was then further explored. Questions probing the effectiveness of the interventions were used when necessary and participants were asked about

the use of other supportive interventions or networks. It has been suggested that other support networks may influence their ability to cope, and in turn result in a potentially unrealistic perception of the interventions by lay counsellors (Denkers, 1999). Extreme caution was taken not to ask questions about the nature of the traumatic incident in order to minimise the possibility of re-traumatization due to the interview process.

2.2 Procedure

Permission was obtained from the support centre to undertake this study. Participants who were identified by the support centre's coordinator were then contacted by lay counsellors at the centre and given a brief overview of the study. Contact details of those participants who agreed to take part in the study were then forwarded to the researcher. The researcher subsequently contacted the participants telephonically in order to fully introduce the study, explain the purpose of the study and to establish whether they would still be willing to participate. A subject information sheet giving details of the research (Appendix C), a consent form to participate (Appendix D) and a form to obtain permission to record the interview (Appendix E), were then forwarded to each participant. A telephonic follow-up was then conducted in order to confirm that the participants had received the above mentioned information, to answer any additional questions or queries which may have arisen and to set up the face-to-face interviews. The intention of this follow-up call was also to minimize the potential drop-out rate.

The individual interviews were conducted at a neutral venue and not at the support centre's support room where their initial intervention occurred, in order to minimize the chance of participants being re-traumatized. Permission to record the interview using an audio-tape recorder was confirmed and the relevant consent forms were collected before the interview commenced. The interview began with a short introduction assuring participants that the information obtained would be confidential. Participants were also informed that participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time, or refuse to answer any questions

without any negative consequences. The interview was then conducted using the semi-structured interview schedule mentioned (Appendix B). Although more costly in terms of time and resources, individual face-to-face interviews are preferred to telephone or mail interviews, as the response rate is normally higher (Neuman, 1997). Participants also had the opportunity to ask for clarification if questions were not understood and the interviewer was able to gain a more detailed understanding of meanings by observing non-verbal responses (Durrheim, 1999). To conclude, the participants were asked to evaluate the interview process and to discuss any issues or concerns they may have regarding the interview or research. A request was made by a participant that the transcripts obtained in this study should not be published, and are therefore not included as an appendix. The participants were also asked whether they had been adversely affected by the interview process. None of the participants felt that they had been adversely affected or that they had been re-traumatized by the interview process. The researcher also used her training, sensitivity to and experience in trauma interventions, to determine whether the victims were experiencing any form of re-traumatization during the interview process, and did not find this to be the case. The interviews were then transcribed by the researcher for analysis purposes.

3 Data analysis

Content analysis is described by Neuman (1997, p.31) as a ‘technique for examining information, or content, in written or symbolic material’, where a researcher identifies material to analyse, creates a procedure to record parts of it, and then documents what is found in this material. More specifically, content analysis can be described as ‘a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context’ (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 21). In the same way, Holsti and Stone (1966, in Krippendorff, 1980, p.23) define content analysis as ‘a research technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics within a text’. It is therefore considered to be a scientific research technique or tool that aims to analyze the symbolic meaning of content within a given text, and make inferences about the text, which could not

necessarily be directly observed (George, 1959; Krippendorff, 1980). These inferences, when considered within a given context or environment, can then be used to establish empirical meaning about certain phenomena (Krippendorff, 1980).

According to Henwood (1996), researches in the human sciences began using content analysis to describe messages in the mass media in the early 20th century. According to Henwood (1996) and Krippendorff (1980), content analysis changed after the Second World War. It was recognised that a deeper level of analysis was needed in order to 'look beneath the surface propaganda' (Henwood, 1996, p.34). This change in content analysis allowed the researcher to explore both the manifest and latent meaning within the text, which lead to the development of a more complex model of analysis (Krippendorff, 1980). As a result, content analysis can be divided into thematic analysis and relational analysis (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The data in this study was analysed according to specific themes and is therefore considered to be conducive to the method of thematic content analysis.

Data in this study was collected by means of semi-structured interviews and then transcribed by the researcher. The data was then transformed into a format conducive to analysis techniques through a process called data reduction (Krippendorff, 1980). This reduction of data is, according to Ritchie, Spencer and O'Connor (2003), not merely the process of reducing or summarizing the data, but a way to begin to understand the essence of the data which will be analysed later on. Krippendorff (1980) maintains that data reduction is done either by eliminating irrelevant information, or by using statistical methods. In this qualitative study, the former method was used where information not pertaining to this study was eliminated. Berelson (1952) as well as Ritchie et al. (2003), caution that the analyst should take care not to eliminate partial or biased data by selecting only the content which fits the analyst's research question. Care should also be taken not to eliminate data too early in the process if it does not seem relevant or immediately meaningful. Care was taken in this study by considering and then reconsidering certain information before it was eliminated. Some participants in this study spoke

about their holiday plans or previous incidents, which was eliminated as it was not considered relevant to this study.

Following the data reduction process, the researcher categorized the remaining data into themes, in order to establish empirical meaning from the given data (Krippendorff, 1980). This was done by reading and re-reading the transcripts and becoming familiar with the content so that an idea could be formulated about the participant's perceptions about the services rendered at the support centre. This process of familiarization is considered crucial by Ritchie et al. (2003), as it builds the foundation for relevant and appropriate coding of the data. This knowledge, together with the recorded data in this study, was used to establish themes, which were then used in the analysis process. By interpreting trends, patterns and differences within the given content and closely examining these themes, the researcher was better able to understand and interpret how victims of crime perceived the services rendered by lay counsellors.

According to Berelson (1952), one assumption of content analysis is that inferences from the data can be validly made, although it should not be denied that the results of any study are limited to these inferences. It should further be remembered that the data collected in this study is based on the participant's subjective perceptions and can therefore not be generalised to other settings. Another assumption made by content analysis, according to Berelson (1952, p.19), is that the 'meanings' gained from the data through these categories or themes correspond with the 'meanings intended by the communicator and/or understood by the audience'. Although an accurate interpretation cannot be guaranteed, an attempt was made in this study to communicate this meaning as effectively as possible between all stakeholders.