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**Mollink, Cathy**

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# COUNSELLORS' PERCEPTIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT THROUGH A LAY COUNSELLING SERVICE IN A DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITY

By

Cathy Mollink

A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Community Based Counselling Psychology

University of the Witwatersrand

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Supervisor: Dr Daleen Alexander

ABSTRACT

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of a group of lay counsellors about their psychological empowerment. It was hypothesised that the counsellors were empowered as a result of their involvement in a counselling service, within the context of a disadvantaged community. Five out of a potential seven participants consented to be interviewed. The researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule to guide the interview process and thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data. The themes that emerged from the analysis related to the components of psychological empowerment as postulated by Zimmerman (1995), as well as the participants' experience within the counselling service. The study concluded that the participants experienced becoming psychologically empowered, which led to improvements within their own lives. Despite this empowerment, the participants did not appear to be enabled to influence the removal of structural barriers that cause social inequities within their communities. The study concluded that this appeared to be as a result of constraints linked to psychological empowerment. In addition, the study found that the counselling service experienced many difficulties that are similar to those experienced by many other organisations that attempt to conduct community work within the South African context.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Community Based Counselling Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

……..

Cathy Mollink ……day of …….2007

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the participants who, despite facing many obstacles, remain committed to serving and empowering their communities.

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## *Chapter One*

# ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

## Background

The researcher's involvement in this study developed as a result of her interest in using lay counselling as a means to extend psychological services to all South Africans. It would be of particular interest to explore this idea in areas where there are communities who are in dire need of such services, but do not have access to them. More than a decade has passed since the new, democratic South Africa became a reality, yet many South Africans continue to live in severely disadvantaged circumstances.

Disadvantaged communities have a higher risk profile for the development of psychological problems. Social factors, including poverty, have been found to be risk factors for psychological problems such as depression (Tomlinson, Swartz, Cooper & Molteno, 2004; Ruane, 2006). Tomlinson, et al (2004), in a study conducted in a disadvantaged community, found that there was a postpartum depression rate of 34.7%, which is three times the expected rate internationally. One of the reasons could be that disadvantaged communities have fewer resources to deal with the psychological effects of social problems than the more affluent ones (Duncan & van Niekerk, 2001). In addition, rates charged by professional psychologists place these services beyond the reach of individuals from disadvantaged communities. Added to this, the government has been slow in addressing this gap that exists in the provision of mental health services to all communities (Brodie, 1998; Elkonin & Sandison, 2006). Dependence has therefore been created on non-governmental organisations to fill the gap (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004).

A project described by Duncan & van Niekerk (2001), has shown that, due to the lack of available mental health care workers in disadvantaged communities, professionals could successfully impart skills to others rather than attempting to conduct one-on-one interventions themselves. This sharing of skills enables lay counsellors to deliver basic counselling services to those in need in their communities. This could ensure that many more people are assisted than would be the case if only professionals are available for intervention.

The community that provided the context wherein the research was conducted is located in an area west of Johannesburg. This community experiences high levels of psychosocial problems, which include unemployment, crime, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse and gang involvement (Anonymous, 2004). The high prevalence of psychological problems and the ongoing lack of resources in disadvantaged communities lead to a seemingly unbreakable cycle of psychosocial problems. Smith (1983) has shown that disadvantaged communities remain stuck in this cycle of poverty due to the fact that they perceive themselves as relatively disempowered in comparison to the other more privileged communities that are situated in close proximity. It therefore appears that dealing with issues related to disempowerment, could become the key to breaking the cycle of psychosocial problems.

In 2001, members of the community under discussion were involved in the implementation of a lay counselling project that formed a component of a larger project known as the Community Counselling Organisation (CCO)[1]. This organisation sought to empower the community through a number of different initiatives. Examples of these include building skills to assist people in securing employment, as well as dealing with the effects of multiple social problems, through a counselling programme that would provide counselling to those in need.

The conceptualisation behind the implementation of a counselling service was underpinned by the belief that members of the community, who were psychologically

[1] The name of the organisation has been changed to protect participants' confidentiality.

empowered through a counselling process, would provide the basis for breaking out of the cycle of poverty and crime that characterised the lives of community members.

Counselling is believed to be an empowering process, as it promotes individuals' psychological growth and also gives recipients the necessary skills to deal with current life challenges. These acquired skills could also be transferred when dealing with similar concerns in the future (Egan, 1990; Corey, 2001; & Nelson-Jones, 2002). A pertinent point to note in the current study is that some of the counsellors, who volunteered themselves for training, are members of this particular community who have achieved professionally and thus, broken free of the cycle of poverty. These individuals wanted to contribute to the empowerment of others in their community. According to McWhirter (1991), if the wider aim of community empowerment is to be achieved, empowerment has to start with a few who could then use their skills to empower others in a ripple effect. The empowerment of the counsellors was therefore seen as the foundation of the ultimate empowerment of the wider community. The building blocks of this foundation were seen as training of the counsellors in basic counselling skills and providing them with practical assistance and support to implement and maintain the counselling service.

Although this study had initially focussed on lay counselling literature, it became clear to the researcher that there was more to lay counselling than the mere provision of a counselling service. In order for such a service to be successful, the counsellors themselves would have to undergo a process of empowerment. The current study therefore, viewed the Community Counselling Organisation (CCO) as an example of an intervention where community members from a disadvantaged community, were empowered to enable them to spread psychological services into a larger area than would normally be possible.

Problem statement

In 2006 it was revealed that the CCO is experiencing a number of problems in delivering counselling services (Fitchet, 2006). The literature has highlighted the need for communities to be empowered in order to break out of the cycle of poverty (Smith, 1983). It therefore appeared relevant to understand if the problems that the CCO has been experiencing are linked to empowerment.

The current study undertook to explore how the counsellors perceived their own empowerment through the counselling training and their work in the service. The researcher also sought to understand if the counsellors were sufficiently psychologically empowered to enable them to provide a successful counselling service to their clients in the future. Counsellors, who are psychologically empowered and demonstrate this in their proactive management of the counselling service, would be indicative of an optimally functioning service (Zimmerman, 1995). Furthermore, Zimmerman (1995) proposes that people who are psychologically empowered would demonstrate this in beliefs that they hold about their personal efficacy, their ability to influence their environment and their interactions with others. This aspect will be expanded on in chapter two. It was also hoped that the results of the study could be used to determine the needs of the counsellors, in order to ensure that they are adequately empowered to successfully provide services to their clients. The researcher sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do the lay counsellors perceive their psychological empowerment with regards to their involvement in the counselling service?
2. Are there restraints that are linked to psychological empowerment within the rendering of counselling services?

The focus of the study was therefore not on programme evaluation of the CCO, but, rather on the effect on the counsellors of their involvement in the CCO. This was undertaken in order understand if the issues that are preventing the CCO from progressing are linked to empowerment. In addition it was hoped that the study could

provide information about empowerment in the South African context, particularly how disadvantaged communities might become empowered in order to gain control of their issues of concern.

In answering the research questions, the researcher adopted a qualitative approach. This is in line with empowerment literature, which suggests that qualitative methods are used in studies that seek to understand how empowerment is achieved (Rappaport, 1981).

## Layout of the study

Chapter two outlines the literature relating to empowerment which underpins the current study. Empowerment and its relationship to counselling is also discussed as well as issues facing volunteer counsellors. Chapter three discusses empowerment in the South African context, as well as the CCO as an example of empowerment theory in action. Chapter four describes the method that was employed in obtaining the study's research results, as well as the actual research process. Chapter five presents the results that were obtained via a process of thematic content analysis and links them to relevant literature that has been presented in the earlier chapters. Chapter six provides some concluding comments on the study and suggests some directions for further research.

## *Chapter Two*

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

This section of the study seeks to explore the literature relating to empowerment. It will include an analysis of the construct of empowerment and will examine the following issues:

- The origin of empowerment theory;
- Basic principles;
- Empowering processes and outcomes;
- Levels of analysis;
- Empowerment in counselling;
- Issues around empowering counsellors;
- Team and group processes;
- Studies that have examined empowerment; and
- Criticisms of empowerment.

## The origin of empowerment theory

Empowerment as a theory within the social sciences was born in the early 1980s. While it was alluded to in the 1970s, Rappaport's 1981 address to the American Psychological Association on empowerment as an alternative to prevention, sparked a proliferation of writing and study of this construct. A common theme that is discussed in the empowerment literature is that there is no consensus on the exact definition of empowerment (McWhirter, 1991; Perkins, 1995; Zippay, 1995; Itzhaky & York, 2000). Despite this suggested lack of consensus, the sections that follow will attempt to outline

an understanding of the construct as proposed by various authors. Zimmerman (2000) has proposed that the ongoing study of empowerment will lead to the creation of a significant body of knowledge that will serve to guide interventions. This will prevent the construct from becoming a passing fad and ensure its usefulness into the future (Zimmerman, 2000).

Basic principles of the theory of empowerment

One of the basic constructs discussed in empowerment literature is power, or the lack thereof, which can be termed powerlessness. Powerlessness can be viewed as the outcome of living with systematic disadvantages and limitations to individual and community growth (McWhirter, 1991). Powerless individuals are viewed as those who are unable to determine their own future and break out of the cycle of living with limitations to growth. Empowerment involves recognition of the way that power operates within society and how individuals and communities are affected by the way power is used (McWhirter, 1991, Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment theory does not blame the powerless for their situation, but holds the environment where these individuals live, responsible for creating social structures that are inherently disempowering. It has been noted that poverty impacts negatively on individuals' perceptions that they have power to influence change (Mayekiso & Tshemese, 2007).

Most attempts to define empowerment allude to the idea that individuals and communities have the capability to take control of the problems that they face, master them and ultimately assume responsibility for them (Seedat, Duncan & Lazurus, 2001). Rappaport adds to this understanding by postulating that empowerment implies "a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power, and legal rights" (1987, p. 121). Empowerment is related to power, but it is also different from power (Zimmerman, 1995). It is possible for a person or group to become empowered without actually experiencing a transfer of political or authoritative power. For example, a minority group may be empowered to assert their

rights and influence a government to meet their needs without actually overthrowing it. Thus, individuals or groups do not need to possess actual power or authority in order to exert control over those who do (Zimmerman, 1995).

Empowerment implies that the person being empowered is able to do something now, that was previously not possible. Although this is the foundation of empowerment, the theory extends further than this and provides an understanding of how empowerment takes place and ways in which it can be recognised and measured.

In an attempt to provide a foundation with regards to empowerment theory, it is critical to understand that it is not a one-dimensional construct and needs to be clearly distinguished from related constructs such as self-efficacy (McWhirter, 1991) and self-esteem (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000). Both of these, and other constructs, may be present in empowered individuals, but they are not in themselves analogous to empowerment. Concepts such as self-efficacy and self-esteem can be viewed as cognitive appraisals of peoples' beliefs in themselves, but the presence of these appraisals in individuals does not automatically indicate the presence of empowerment (McWhirter, 1991; Zimmerman, 1995, 2000). Individuals will demonstrate that they are empowered through their ability to influence their environment, as well as their interactions with others. This will be elaborated in the section dealing with outcomes. It is also important to note that empowerment is dynamic and can be viewed as a process as well as an outcome.

Empowering processes

Empowerment can be viewed as both a process and an outcome (Swift & Levin, cited in Zimmerman, 2000). Empowering processes can be described as those that cause individuals to develop an increased sense of self-worth, self-confidence and self-reliance. Due to these aforementioned attributes, individuals are able to recognise their own skills and resources (van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). In addition, empowering processes are generally regarded as those that assist individuals and communities to take control of

issues that affect them. This is possible as empowering processes enable individuals to recognise how the power dynamics in their particular context affect their ability to deal with issues of concern (McWhirter, 1991), and remove barriers to take control of these issues (Fawcett, Paine-Andrews, Francisco, & Schultz, 1995). In addition, empowering processes assist individuals to develop skills which enable them to take control of their issues of concern (McWhirter, 1991; Fawcett et al., 1995). McWhirter further postulates that as a result of empowering processes, individuals are able to exercise the control they have gained, but without infringing on the rights of others. They are subsequently able to support the empowerment of others in the community (McWhirter, 1991).

An important aspect of the above is the development of skills. People who are empowered with new skills are enabled to take control of their issues of concern. The current study aims to examine the process that the counsellors of the CCO were exposed to when they were trained and in their work for the CCO. The discussion section will examine the CCO, in order to understand if involvement in this organisation was an empowering process for the counsellors.

The role of the professional in the process of empowerment

The literature around empowerment speaks of a professional who takes responsibility for this process (Golden, 1991; Zimmerman, 2000; van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). Another important aspect of the process of empowerment is that for it to be truly empowering, it should never be imposed (Tomlinson & Swartz, 2002; Ngonyama Ka Sigogo & Modipa, 2004; Van Wyk & Naidoo, 2006). Empowering processes should always be collaborative and although a professional is usually involved in this process, the role of the professional is that of collaborator (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Balcazar, Garate-Serafini & Keys, 2004). Empowerment can be viewed as a value orientation and this implies a way of working that guides a professional who seeks to implement an empowering process (Zimmerman, 2000). In implementing an empowering process, the professional is required to ensure that the goals are aligned to achieving an empowered outcome. This implies ensuring that those that the professional seeks to empower, are left

with a sense that they are able to take control of issues that they previously found to be insurmountable. Furthermore, the participants should not feel that they are forever dependent on the professional to keep the organisation running. Over time, they should be empowered to operate on their own (Rappaport, 1987).

An issue that sometimes arises in community work is that the community may reject the assistance offered by professionals if there are perceived differences between the community and the professional. This is particularly true if the community perceives the professional to be more privileged than the community and comes from a racial group that is perceived as the oppressor (Lykes, 1997; Gibson, Sandenbergh & Swartz, 2001). In the current study, the impact of the professional who assisted the counsellors will be considered.

Empowerment as an outcome

Processes that are empowering, lead to empowered outcomes (Zimmerman, 2000). Understanding what constitutes an empowered outcome assists in the process of identifying the presence of empowerment. When determining if a process has led to an empowered outcome, it is important to note that studies have shown that citizen involvement leads to people feeling better about themselves and more empowered – even if they do not necessarily achieve goals (Stone & Levine, 1985). People who are empowered are able to participate more fully in their communities through decision-making and this gives them a sense of being empowered and in control of their own futures (van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004).

Empowered outcomes can be studied across multiple levels of analysis. Empowerment is said to take place at the individual, small group, community and organisational levels (Zimmerman, 2000; Labonte, Lord & Hutchison, Wilson, cited in Clark & Krupa, 2002). Empowerment at the different levels of analysis influences and is influenced by the other levels. It is therefore difficult to study each of the levels in isolation (Itzhaky & York,

2000; Zimmerman, 2000). In the current study, the personal empowerment of the counsellors is being studied while also keeping in mind how this was influenced by the operation of the CCO as an organisation. The focus on personal empowerment, as opposed to larger political structures, is believed to be justified as it has been suggested that empowerment interventions should be initiated on a small scale while keeping the bigger picture in mind (Weick, cited in Perkins, 1995). This view is discussed in detail later in the report.

Empowerment at the individual level

Many authors have attempted to provide definitions of the construct of empowerment. Most models that describe empowerment at the individual level refer to the interaction of cognitive aspects, such as self-efficacy, that reside within the individual and action taken as a result of these cognitive aspects (McWhirter, 1991; Laverack & Wallerstein, 2001; Zimmerman, 1995, 2000). These models view self-efficacy as an individual's ability to take action and be effective. It is therefore not a static trait, but one that is dynamic and allows for action.

In addition to the above constructions of empowerment at the individual level, Zimmerman (1995, 2000) has referred to empowerment at this level as Psychological Empowerment (PE). He describes PE as an outcome that can be seen in three different dimensions: the intrapersonal component, the interactional component and the behavioural component.

*The Intrapersonal Component*

This component refers to how people think about themselves and includes domain-specific perceived control and self-efficacy, motivation to control, perceived competence and mastery. Domain-specific perceived control refers to a person's beliefs about his/her ability to exert influence in the different life spheres that the person engages with.

Examples of these spheres could include family, work or socio-political contexts. Perceived control is viewed in three domains (Zimmerman, 2000) namely:

- The personality domain. Within personality, individuals will have a tendency to have either an internal or an external locus of control. Those with an internal locus of control will generally believe that they are able to influence outcomes, while the opposite is true of individuals with an external locus of control (Lefcourt, 1991).
- The cognitive domain. Individuals' beliefs about themselves tend to influence their feelings of self-efficacy. This refers to the judgements individuals make in relation to how effective they believe they will be in performing the behaviours necessary to achieve desired goals.
- The motivational domain. In order to feel a sense of control, individuals must feel motivated to influence their environments.

Thus, it is expected that a person who is psychologically empowered will have an internal locus of control, a sense of self-efficacy and will feel motivated to influence the environment. The perceptions that constitute perceived control are an important foundation of PE, as it is a person's beliefs about his/her ability that enable action that will lead to achievement of goals (Zimmerman, 1995).

*The Interactional Component*

This component refers to the understanding people develop about their community and related socio-political issues. It has been postulated that the marginalized groups tend not to have a critical view of the world, and are therefore unable to recognise the injustices that lead to their oppression (Taylor, 1995; Balcazar et al., 2004). This limits their ability to believe that they might be able to transform their world. In order to become empowered, people are required to learn about their options in the context in which they operate (Zimmerman, 1995). This is important as it enables people to exert control in their environment. This involves developing an understanding of the norms and values of

their particular context. In order to effectively engage in their environment, individuals also need to develop a critical awareness of the causal agents within the environment (Taylor, 1995). The critical awareness includes an understanding of the resources needed to achieve a desired goal, knowledge of how to obtain those resources and skills to manage the resources once they are obtained. The ability to mobilise resources suggests environmental mastery. According to Keiffer (cited in Zimmerman, 2000), the development of a critical awareness also leads to people understanding when to engage in conflict and when to avoid it.

The development of skills such as decision-making, problem-solving and leadership skills is a critical part of the interactional component of empowerment. The development of skills usually takes place in organisations or settings where individuals are provided with opportunities to participate fully and are included in decision-making. The development of skills enables individuals to become independent and control events in their lives. Zimmerman (1995) views the interactional component as the link between perceived control and taking action to exert control.

*The Behavioural Component*

This component refers to actions people take to directly influence outcomes. The combination of the intrapersonal and interactional components of empowerment enables individuals to directly influence outcomes through action (Zimmerman, 1995).

A person who is psychologically empowered is less dependent on others and takes pride in his/her personal knowledge and experience. As a result, the person's perceptions of their relationships with others and their social setting also go through a process of change (van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). These changes enable people to determine their own needs and ultimately assume the right to change their environment to meet these identified needs (van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004).

In the current study, the researcher operationalised the notion of empowerment using the criteria for PE as described in the preceding section. Questions in the interview were constructed to elicit data relating to how the counsellors demonstrate the presence of intrapersonal aspects of PE. The presence of these aspects was investigated by examining the counsellors' interactions with the environment and others in the course of their work for the CCO and in their everyday lives.

Empowerment at the organisational and community level

The current study aims to determine if the counsellors were psychologically empowered through their involvement in the counselling service. Empowerment at the organisational, small group or community level was therefore not a focus of this study. Despite this, it was still important for the researcher to understand how the CCO, as an organisation, contributed towards the counsellors' sense of empowerment. An organisation that is empowering will be one that allows its members to share information and experiences and enable them to identify with each other. In addition, the organisation should allow members to share responsibility, support one another and should allow for the development of skills (Zimmerman, 2000). It has also been suggested that the creation of formal roles and responsibilities for the people within the organisation assists in fostering a sense of belonging and adds to the feelings of empowerment of the participants (Rappport 1987).

It is hoped that ultimately, through the CCO, the whole community that it serves might be empowered and although this is not a focus of the current study, a definition of community empowerment is provided here in order for the reader to understand how empowerment at the different levels interact. "Societal (community) empowerment implies that community members enjoy democratic participation in projects of collective interest; this type of empowerment fosters new attitudes to authority and toward control of one's life circumstances" (Lekoko & van der Merwe, 2006, p327). Zimmerman (2000) has described a number of key characteristics that describe empowered communities. He

postulates that an empowered community relies on organisations that are well-connected to the community and provides opportunities for its members to become involved in activities that are relevant to their lives e.g. crime prevention, planning commissions and health care. In addition he describes an empowered community as one that has accessible resources for all its community residents.

Studies of empowerment

Many examples of empowerment theory have found expression in a wide range of community programmes world-wide. In some cases, the term "empowerment" is not actually used, although the actions of the professional/researcher indicate that they wish to empower others (McWhirter, 1991). Empowerment is also frequently expressed through other methods such as Activity Theory (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004) and Participatory Action Research (Lykes, 1997). In such studies, participants are empowered and become part of the researcher's research which offers them a sense of control and competence that could be described as empowerment. It was beyond the scope of this particular study to involve the research participants in the study and the researcher's mandate was to merely investigate a process that had already taken place and determine whether this was an empowering process.

Few of the studies that were analysed by the researcher are similar to the current study. However, Zimmerman (2000) has cited examples of empowerment that share some commonalities. In a study by Kieffer (cited in Zimmerman, 2000), the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with migrant workers, housewives and miners who were involved in grass-roots organisations in their communities. The study found that the participants emerged as community leaders, as a result of their involvement. They demonstrated that they felt more powerful, developed a greater sense of competence and cultivated more resources for social action. This was the case even when the participants did not actually gain more power in the process or did not fully achieve their goals. Other studies cited by Zimmerman (2000) have shown that involvement in community

organisations leads to greater social activism and involvement, increased feelings of competence and control and a reduction in feelings of alienation.

A qualitative study described by Stacki and Monkman, (2003) highlights the difficulty experienced by individuals from marginalized groups in becoming empowered to such an extent that they are enabled to address social inequities in their environments. In this study, women who experienced gender and racial discrimination became psychologically empowered. Their empowerment had a positive impact on their lives and enabled them to progress in ways that were not normally open to women in the communities in which they lived. Despite their psychological empowerment, they were not able to influence the removal of barriers to equality for all women in their communities. Stacki and Monkman, (2003) suggest that practices that affect social change do not transform quickly. They propose that this is the result of the fact that structural barriers within societies are the result of centuries of patriarchal, political, cultural and religious norms and value systems that limit individuals.

While this study explored empowerment in relation to gender inequality, it could be proposed that the findings are also applicable to individuals from all marginalized groups who attempt to remove structural barriers in society. This could be applicable within the South African context, where years of institutionalised, racial discrimination have led to a deeply entrenched structural inequality (Taylor, 1995). In addressing these inequities, Taylor (1995) proposes that impoverished communities in South Africa should be empowered through direct action at the grassroots level.

A South African project that shares some links with the current study has been described by Naidoo and Van Wyk (2003). In this project, an intern psychologist was employed to offer counselling services to a community whose members experienced many psychosocial problems. These problems could be viewed as similar to those occurring in the area served by the CCO. As well as offering counselling services, the intern psychologist sought to empower teachers in the local school so that they might be in a position to identify psychological problems in their learners and manage these

proactively. In this project, empowerment was defined as a process that enables people to: enhance their personal power, create awareness of alternative strategies to problem solving and access resources in society (Naidoo & Van Wyk, 2003).

Gibson and Swartz (2004) have described another South African project that focussed on community empowerment. In this project professional psychologists offered their services to train community mental health workers in counselling skills. The idea behind this project was that the workers would be in a position to implement empowerment programmes within their community. The findings of this study suggest that the workers experienced the work as too difficult and hoped for more support from the professionals.

Evaluating empowerment

While the literature on empowerment has suggested ways of evaluating the existence of empowered outcomes, the researcher had to take cognisance of the issues surrounding the measurement of empowerment. Zimmerman (1995) has highlighted a number of important aspects of empowerment that impact on how this construct should be evaluated. The first of these concerns the fact that empowerment can have varying meanings in different contexts. PE may differ across dimensions of people's lives. A person may feel disempowered within a work setting, but could feel empowered within his/her community. A person who is able to generalise skills across many life domains would be expected to experience a high level of empowerment. In addition PE has different meanings for different people. Populations vary in terms of issues such as age, sex and socio-economic status. What constitutes empowerment for one group of people may not be applicable to a different group. Zimmerman also notes that PE is a dynamic variable that can fluctuate over time. Thus, people can become empowered at one point in time, yet, experience disempowerment at another. It is also important to note that some individuals may be more or less empowered than others.

As a result of these afore-mentioned aspects of empowerment, a universal measure of PE does not exist and efforts to construct one could relegate PE to the status of a static personality trait (Zimmerman, 1995).

In identifying the existence of PE in the current study, the researcher was required to fully understand the context in which the counsellors are operating and understand how the CCO initiative built on existing skills within the community (McWhirter, 1991). Communities have existing ways of dealing with issues that concern them and empowerment initiatives that build on existing capabilities have a greater likelihood of succeeding than initiatives that are imposed.

Empowerment in counselling

Empowerment is often cited as an outcome of the counselling process (McWhirter, 1991; Lewis, Lewis, Daniels & D'Andrea, 2003). People usually seek out counselling when they face crises in their lives that they are unable to cope with. Counselling provides people with skills that assist them to deal with these crises, as well as with problems that arise in the future (Nelson-Jones, 2002). Nelson-Jones has spoken of the "skilled client," which implies that following a counselling process the client emerges in a better position to cope with his/her difficulties (2002, p.xiii). In explaining this process, Nelson Jones asserts that, "counsellors and therapists using the skilled client model are practitioners who, within the context of accepting, affirming and collaborative working relationships, assist clients to improve specific mind skills and communication/action skills in order to manage current and future problems more effectively and thus, to lead happier and more fulfilled lives (2002, p.xiii)." This could be seen as analogous to the process that takes place when individuals and communities are empowered. In the same way as Seedat et al., (2001) has asserted that empowerment reflects the idea that a community can master and gain control of its own issues, Nelson-Jones places the same faith in individuals' ability to master their own psychological issues and build capacity to deal with future issues. The collaborative relationship between therapist and client is also related to the idea that empowerment interventions are collaborative processes between communities

and support organisations (Fawcet et al., 1995). In order for these interventions to be successful, there is a great deal of responsibility on the organisations to train and assist their counsellors to be able to provide a service to the community. Specifically, the organisation needs to empower their counsellors to ensure that they are enabled to carry out their work. The next section examines some of the issues facing voluntary organisations in the process of empowering counsellors.

Issues facing volunteer counselling services

The process of empowering counsellors is not a simple one. There are many issues facing organisations such as the CCO that aim to provide counselling services through the use of volunteers (Tyndall, 1993). A number of these are outlined below:

- **Recruitment and selection of counsellors**. Tyndall (1993) has emphasised the need to be transparent with potential volunteer counsellors about the demands of counselling when recruiting. Counsellors should be aware that they will not be compensated financially, but are likely to be rewarded through the fulfilment they receive in the work they do. In addition, he states that counsellors appreciate being taken seriously by the organisation and should be informed of their roles and responsibilities which should be documented. When selecting counsellors, Tyndall suggests that organisations should look for personal characteristics such as caring and an ability to respond to others in crisis with sensitivity.

- **Training of counsellors.** Voluntary organisations need to carefully consider how to structure their training. Most programmes emphasise three elements in the training process (Dryden & Thorne, 1991; Tyndall, 1993).
    - The acquisition of knowledge and information;
    - The learning and practise of counselling skills; and
    - The development of personal understanding and sensitivity.

  The literature around counselling also emphasises the need for counsellors to understand the importance of self-care (Brems 2001; Gibson, Swartz, &

Sadenbergh, 2002; Schon, Gower & Kotze, 2005). In addition, many organisations provide ongoing in-service training as well as supervision for their counsellors (Tyndall, 1993, Gibson et al., 2002). This is seen as a critical aspect in terms of maintaining counsellors' morale and motivation and preventing burnout (Gibson et al., 2002).

- **Administrative issues**. Many organisations face the problem of having to rely on their counsellors to complete the administrative tasks that are an inevitable part of the running of a counselling organisation. This can be problematic as it can be frustrating for counsellors who wish to focus on the process of counselling rather than other issues (Tyndall, 1993). In addition, counselling organisations are often staffed by individuals who share a similar set of character traits. This can present difficulties as the varying tasks in such organisations require a range of skills which may not be present amongst the volunteer counsellors (Tyndall, 1993).

- **Support of counsellors**. In order to deal with the demands placed on counsellors in carrying out their work, they require ongoing support from the organisation. Gibson et al. (2002) have suggested that organisations require a system of authority where one individual is ultimately responsible for the running of the organisation. This can provide a "holding" environment for the counsellors, so that they can proceed with the task of counselling, without having to focus on other issues. (Gibson et al 2002, p.101). It is critical though that the type of leadership that is provided allows for counsellors to participate fully. This will ensure that the organisation contributes to the empowerment of its counsellors (Zimmerman, 1995; Lewis et al., 2003). Counsellors also require ongoing support in the form of training (Schon et al., 2005). Most organisations provide an initial training course that covers basic counselling skills. As experience in counselling is gained, counsellors find themselves facing new issues, which may not have been dealt with in the initial course. It is therefore critical that their skills are updated. The literature also places importance on counsellors receiving

supervision in order to assist them to deal with difficulties that arise in the counselling process (Tyndall, 1993; Schon et al., 2005.)

- **Funding and other resources.** The literature deals extensively with the difficulties faced by counselling organisations in obtaining critical funding and other resources such as premises to counsel from (Tyndall, 1993; Lewis et al., 2003). This can be frustrating for counsellors who wish to proceed with the process of providing services to their clients, but are forced to spend time ensuring that funds and resources are available.

- **Acceptance of service by community.** Services offering counselling in the community experience problems in terms of non-attendance of clients (Kriegler, 2005)**.** Research has shown that the average number of sessions attended by clients in community settings is between 1 and 2 (Seedat, Kruger & Bode, 2003; Ahmed & Pillay, 2004). There are many possible reasons for this, such as lack of funds for transport to counselling venues, inability to take time off work to attend sessions, lack of understanding of the function of counselling and clients may have other pressing material needs that take precedence over counselling (Kriegler, 2005). In addition, if a community is not consulted with regards to services being offered to it, the services may not meet the community's needs and may therefore be rejected (Ngonyama Ka Sigogo & Modipa, 2004; Van Wyk & Naidoo, 2006). Research has also shown that individuals who have not previously been exposed to counselling do not always fully appreciate the benefits of counselling. A perception exists that people who attend counselling are "mad" or suffer from severe mental illness (van Wyk & Naidoo, 2006).

- **High attrition rate of counsellors.** Statistics relating to how long volunteer counsellors usually stay with an organisation are difficult to obtain (Tyndall, 1993). Within the United Kingdom, it is thought that the turnover rate is high and that the longest period that volunteer counsellors are likely to stay in service, is three years (Tyndall, 1993). Bearing in mind the difficulties faced by these

counsellors, it seems likely that in South Africa, the service of volunteer counsellors may be of short duration. It has been noted that, in general, within community contexts, mental health workers have a high attrition rate (Ngonyama Ka Sigogo & Modipa, 2004). The reasons for counsellors leaving could be related to two main issues (Tyndall, 1993). Counsellors may leave because they are frustrated by issues within the organisation and do not receive adequate support and supervision. Other counsellors may leave in order to pursue counselling in a capacity where they are paid. Many who leave use their skills elsewhere and the community at large benefits from the training of the counsellor, although the organisation that provided the training experiences a loss (Tyndall, 1993).

- **Teamwork skills**. The effectiveness of a counselling organisation is reliant, to some extent, on the ability of its members to be able to work collaboratively to achieve goals and serve the community (Ebersohn, Ferreira-Prevost, Maree & Alexander, 2007). In a study of professionals offering services to the community, it was found that certain skills are required for the team to work effectively together (Ebersohn et al., 2007). Among the skills that were identified were: communication skills, leadership skills, management skills, ability to allocate roles effectively and the ability to deal with conflict or discord. As well as being a group offering counselling services to the community, the CCO functioned as a support group for its members. Group theory also emphasises the importance of leadership skills in helping to guide and direct the team (Corey & Corey, 1992). In addition, this theory also suggests that in order for groups to progress, it is necessary for the leader to challenge the group members to take risks in order for the group to achieve its goals. The importance of the group leader dealing effectively with conflict is also seen as a critical step in the growth of the group members (Corey & Corey, 1992).

Critical analysis of empowerment

Although empowerment is a construct that holds significant promise, it has not gone without criticism. It is important to be aware of these criticisms to ensure that interventions that seek to be empowering, lead to positive outcomes for the participants.

A very important criticism of empowerment relates to the fact that the construct could be used to hold individuals responsible for resolving their own issues, thereby relieving institutions such as government bodies from their responsibility of ensuring that disadvantaged communities are provided with the necessary resources that they require (Zimmerman, 2000).

Clark & Krupa (2002) have suggested that psychologists working within an empowerment framework are required to reflect critically on their work and understand that empowerment may not always have one outcome. What the psychologist sees as empowering, may not always be what the community believes to be empowering. In addition, it may not always be in the community's interest to be empowered (Riger, 1993; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Riger (1993), writing from a feminist perspective, has strongly criticised empowerment and states that its notions of control and mastery are based on masculine and western notions and do not allow for feminine interpretations of community. According to Riger (1993), when people who have previously been disempowered are subsequently empowered, this could lead to their disconnection from the rest of the community. In many communities, a sense of community and togetherness is essential for survival of all members. In the current study, the researcher critically analyses how empowerment of the counsellors has impacted on their relationships with the wider community.

Another important criticism that could have relevance for the current study is that many empowerment studies have focussed on empowerment at the individual level only, which has led to criticism of it as a static, cognitive construct (Riger, 1993; Zimmerman, 2000). The current study also focuses on PE, which could limit its usefulness in terms of the

wider construct of empowerment. In view of the fact that empowerment of an entire community is a lengthy process, it is believed that the initial PE of the counsellors is an important starting point in this process. Weick (cited in Perkins, 1995) has suggested that in implementing new interventions, psychologists should start small and locally, while keeping the bigger picture in sight. Based on this, the focus on empowerment at the individual level as a foundation for wider empowerment is justified in the current study. In addition, Zimmerman (2000) has pointed out that an empowered organisation does not exist if there are not empowered individuals running the organisation. It is impossible to study one level of analysis without considering the other levels. Within chapter five, the researcher discusses the issue of the CCO as an organisation and examines how it contributed to the empowerment of the counsellors.

Concluding comments on the literature presented

Review of the literature has highlighted that, despite the fact that empowerment has been written about extensively, many authors still believe that it has not been adequately defined. Despite this, the theory that has been proposed by various authors has been presented. This theory could form the basis of the ongoing study of empowerment. Empowerment has been presented as a process as well as an outcome that can be seen on multiple levels. It has also been viewed as dynamic. On the individual level, PE involves not only the development of greater feelings of competence, but also enables individuals to change the way they behave in relation to others. Chapter three brings empowerment into the South African arena, and argues for the inclusion of empowerment theory in future psychological interventions. The CCO is also discussed as an example of empowerment theory in action.

## *Chapter Three*

# EMPOWERMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

## Introduction

There is extensive literature from America on empowerment as a Community Psychology tool of intervention. However, the construct has not been given much attention in the South African context (Seedat et al., 2001). With the history of oppression in South Africa, empowerment could provide the basis for wide-scale interventions that could extend psychological services to those who have not previously had access to these services. The current study is relevant, as it could provide some insight into how individuals could be empowered, thereby enabling them to extend psychological services into their communities. In this chapter, the researcher explains the need for psychologists to utilise empowerment theory as a means to render psychology more relevant in addressing the pressing problems faced by many South Africans. The chapter also examines the CCO as an example of empowerment theory in action.

## The relevance of psychology in the South African context

As political change in South Africa became a possibility in the 1980s, progressive psychologists became involved in the relevance debate regarding the field of psychological services (Macleod, 2004). The relevance of psychology came under question due to its apparent inability to address the pressing psychological issues faced by the majority of South Africans (Macleod, 2004; Seedat, Mackenzie & Stevens, 2004). This questioning was sparked by criticisms that were levelled against Psychology during the apartheid years. These criticisms were related to the fact that clinical and counselling

psychological services were traditionally inaccessible to the majority of South Africans who lived in impoverished conditions (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Van Wyk & Naidoo, 2006). One-on-one therapeutic modalities and a focus on the individual as the cause of pathology were also criticised as inadequate approaches for addressing the material and oppressive conditions faced by the majority of South Africans (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Yen, 2007).

As South Africa moves through the second decade of democracy, the discipline of Psychology continues in its quest to prove its relevance as a profession that contributes to the improvement of the psychological and social conditions of all its citizens (Seedat et al., 2004). Many communities continue to live in severely deprived conditions. Statistics show that between 40 and 50 percent of South Africans live in abject poverty (Van Niekerk cited in Franchi & Duncan, 2003; Ahmed & Pillay, 2004). Research has shown that poverty places individuals at high risk for developing psychological problems (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Tomlinson et al., 2004). Thus, it is likely that, among the approximately 40 percent of South Africans living in poverty, the need for psychological services is great. This places pressure on the profession of psychology to address these pressing needs. The government has attempted to address the lack of services through endeavours such as the creation of the category of Registered Counsellor. This category was created to facilitate the training of more counsellors who would be available to offer services to the community. A study by Elkonin and Sandison (2006) has revealed that very few individuals have actually successfully registered with the Professional Board of Psychology as registered counsellors, which would have enabled them to be in a position to offer counselling services. This suggests that the creation of the Registered Counsellor category has done little to address the lack of psychological services in South Africa.

Community psychology and empowerment

One form of psychology that has been viewed as a potential tool to address the social and psychological conditions of previously disadvantaged communities is Community psychology (Seedat et al., 2004; Marks, 2006). This is due to the fact that Community

psychology has potential as a framework for beginning to address the needs of the previously disadvantaged and psychologically under-serviced populations. Community psychology is viewed by some as a powerful tool that has a broad focus and is geared towards prevention of mental illness, health promotion, development and empowerment of individuals, groups and communities (Prilleltensky, 2001; Naidoo & Van Wyk, 2003). In addition, Community psychology recognises that psychological and other difficulties of living are intensified by lack of resources and by political and social inequity (Naidoo, 2000).

Despite these aforementioned attributes of Community psychology, further study and application is required for this division of psychology to be fully relevant and useful in the South African context (Seedat et al., 2001). Community psychology as a field of study is relatively new to South Africa (Ngonyama Ka Sigogo & Modipa, 2004). As a result, the theory that guides this branch of psychology is lacking (Gibson, Sandenbergh & Swartz, 2001; Ngonyama ka Sigogo, Hooper, Long, Lykes, Wilson & Zietkiewicz, 2004; Marks, 2006). Studies such as the current one could be important and might add to the process of theory development. A number of authors have suggested that empowerment and community psychology are clearly linked and that the study of empowerment could enhance the development of community psychology as a scientific endeavour (Rappaport, 1987, Naidoo, 2000). Community psychology has been described as an endeavour that "was specifically designed to shift power from professionals into the hands of ordinary people and to build the capacity of communities to address problems in their social and political environments" (Gibson & Swartz, 2004, p.466).

A key aspect of community psychology relates to the fact that services should be accessible to people where they need them (Van Wyk & Naidoo, 2006). Community psychology projects that focus on the transfer of skills to non-professionals, using an empowerment framework, appear to be an effective means of increasing the possibility of many people receiving psychological services (Duncan & van Niekerk, 2001). The decision to focus on empowerment in this study is underpinned by a belief that efforts to construct a relevant community psychology for South Africa should include development

of the theory and application of empowerment ideology. A recent literature search of South African databases revealed very few projects that focussed on empowerment in the way that it was undertaken in the formation of the CCO. The current study is relevant, as it is hoped it could provide some insight into how psychological services could be extended to many South Africans, using empowerment as a vehicle. In addition, it has been proposed that there is a dearth of theories dealing with psychological issues in the South African context and that a great deal of South African research is based on theories developed in high-income countries (Macleod, 2004). It has been proposed, therefore, that theories developed elsewhere need to be applied critically within the South African context (Macleod, 2004). In addition, South Africa's unique socio-political-historical context creates an opportunity for South Africans to contribute to local and global theoretical debates in a meaningful way (Macleod, 2004). The following section discusses some of the unique aspects of the South African context that have implications for empowerment processes.

South Africa's unique history and its implications for empowerment processes

According to Taylor (1995), community empowerment in South Africa must be viewed within the broader struggle for liberation from political oppression and material deprivation. Based on this, empowerment is not limited to providing basic needs, human resource development or changing institutional frameworks. Taylor (1995) proposes that community empowerment in this context requires the development of capacities of people which results in the removal of racial, class and gender imbalances, resulting in a shift in power relations in favour of the oppressed minority. In achieving this, Taylor (1995) recommends that capacities should be built in people through assisting the poor to recognise that their struggles are inextricably linked to structural inequalities. The lack of resources that characterises disadvantaged communities often results in crime and violence. This violence can be seen as the result of competition for scarce resources (Taylor, 1995). The youth in particular, are a vulnerable group when resources are scarce. In South Africa, the collapse of the educational and economic systems in the

apartheid years, led to a culture of crime and violence (Taylor, 1995). While 13 years of democracy have passed, many communities, such as the one the CCO aims to serve, continue to experience high levels of crime and violence (Anonymous, 2004). The CCO aimed to tackle these social problems through an empowerment process.

The following section explains the manner in which the CCO was positioned as an empowerment initiative.

## The Community Counselling Organisation (CCO) – an example of application of empowerment theory in South Africa

### *The positioning of the CCO as an empowerment initiative*

The CCO was initiated in 2001 as a means of dealing with the high prevalence of psycho-social problems in a disadvantaged community in region 4 of Johannesburg. There are seven counsellors who work for the CCO on a voluntary basis. One of the counsellors is responsible for leading the group and attending to administrative issues, including generating referrals from a local school. Most of the counsellors are in full time employment during the week and therefore see CCO clients on Saturday mornings.

The CCO's mission statement alludes to the idea of improving conditions for the whole community through empowerment projects. These projects aim to build capacity by providing community members with technical and leadership skills. In addition, community participation in these projects is encouraged. [2]

In the proposal document, the transfer of skills is identified as a key objective in empowering the community. It also emphasises that, although professionals will be involved initially, the transfer of skills will enable the community to master and control issues of concern without continued assistance in the future, unless members actively

[2]The actual mission statement is not quoted here in order to protect the identity of the participants

seek out assistance from professionals. When the CCO was initiated, a professional psychologist was responsible for training the counsellors and was available to offer them assistance when required. The particular professional that was involved also happened to have lived and worked in the same community for a particular time-frame as the counsellors and therefore had an in-depth understanding of the issues faced by the counsellors. This is important as Lykes (1997) has emphasised the need for the researcher (or professional) who is involved in empowerment efforts to consider his/her impact on the community. The fact that the professional shared a common background with the counsellors could have had an impact on the degree of success of the empowerment initiative.

Although the CCO proposal document refers to empowerment of the whole community as the ultimate goal, empowerment, for the purposes of this research, is studied as it is manifested on the individual level (PE). Large-scale empowerment (i.e. empowerment of a whole community) is a lengthy process and when evaluating the impact of empowerment initiatives, researchers may have to be satisfied with small changes to start with (Fawcett et al., 1995; Laverack & Wallerstein 2001). While Zimmerman (2000) has said that empowerment needs to be viewed across all levels of analysis (i.e. individual, organisational and community), he has also stated that there cannot be empowered communities or organisations without empowered individuals. Although the primary focus of the study was on the PE of the individual counsellors, attention was paid to the presence (or lack of) empowering aspects of the CCO as an organisation and how this has impacted on the PE of the counsellors and vice versa.

The training of the counsellors in basic counselling skills was viewed as the first step in the process of their PE development.

*Empowerment of counsellors*

In many ways, the CCO is not dissimilar to other organisations that offer counselling services through the use of volunteers (Tyndall, 1993). What is different about the CCO, in the view of the current study, is that the CCO aimed to provide the basis for the empowerment of a community that experienced many psycho-social problems. The process of PE, in the case of the CCO, relied on the transfer of skills, particularly the development of basic counselling skills. Various authors (Egan, 1990; Corey, 2001; Nelson-Jones, 2002) have presented models of counselling that are segmented into micro-skills that can be easily transferred to lay counsellors. Training in basic counselling skills is seen as empowering, as it provides the counsellors with concrete skills that they are able to use to intervene in a situation that they previously believed was insurmountable. In addition, van den Berg & Klopper (2001) have proposed that becoming involved in a community victim empowerment programme can assist in the healing of those who have been victims of crime or other traumas. This may be a result of the self-awareness that counsellors develop in the process of receiving training and in the process of counselling others (Egan, 1990; Brems 2001; Gibson et al., 2002; Szymanska, 2002). Some of the members of the CCO have themselves been exposed to traumas and other difficult life situations. It was expected, therefore, that the current study might find that the counsellors became empowered, both through the training they received, as well as in their counselling work for the CCO.

In conducting this study, the researcher sought to understand how the counsellors of the CCO perceive their PE. It was assumed that if the counsellors perceive that they are adequately empowered, this would be demonstrated at the intrapersonal, interactional and behavioural levels (as discussed in chapter two). Based on this, PE should be manifested in the perceptions counsellors have of their personal competence and how these perceptions influence the manner in which they act to influence their environment.

*Current status of the CCO*

Since the beginning of 2006, the CCO has not been very active in conducting counselling in their community. A research project conducted by Fitchet (2006) explored the needs of the counsellors, as well as possible barriers that were preventing them from proceeding with their counselling work. The findings of this study revealed that there are very real and pressing concerns that are preventing the counsellors from continuing with the work of the CCO. These include practical issues such as time for the both the counsellor and the client, the need for a smooth administration process, as well as funding and premises in which to conduct the counselling. Fitchet also speculated that some of the counsellors might be experiencing burnout. In the current study, the researcher was required to keep in mind the problems expressed by the counsellors in Fitchet's study and understand if and how this might link to their perceptions of their empowerment.

## Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the issues of empowerment in the South African context. Many South Africans continue to live in severely deprived circumstances due to widespread poverty. Various authors have criticised psychology for not being relevant in solving the problems faced by the majority of South Africans. Subsequently, empowerment has been proposed as a way forward for psychologists to assist the poor and marginalized to break out of the cycle of poverty. Within the framework of empowerment, a suggestion that has been proposed is that psychologists should share their skills and train others to extend psychological services to all who require them. In this chapter, the CCO has been discussed as one such project that aimed to empower a community by extending psychological services to many people within the community. In the next chapter, the method that was employed in the current study will be discussed.

## *Chapter Four*

# METHOD

## Introduction

The previous two chapters have described the theory of empowerment and explained its relevance in the South African context. The present chapter will discuss the broad theoretical orientation of the research as well as the method that was employed in gathering and analysing the research data. The actual research process, as it unfolded, is also discussed.

## Research method

### *A qualitative approach*

The current study aimed, through a qualitative approach, to explore empowerment as it was experienced in a specific service that has been implemented in a disadvantaged community. Qualitative research can be described as a method which enables researchers to, "understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage and live through situations" (Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 1999, p. 216). The researcher therefore attempts to understand the phenomena being studied from the viewpoint of the participants. The researcher does not attempt to verify conclusions or theory, but wishes to expand or enrich understanding (Elliot et al., 1999). Babbie and Mouton (2001) describe qualitative research designs as having the following characteristics: a detailed encounter with the participants in the study, a small number of cases or participants and a flexible research approach that allows the researcher to make changes to the study during the process.

Qualitative methods are preferred in studies that seek to understand how empowerment is achieved (Rappaport, 1981). The theory of empowerment, described in chapter two, has highlighted that empowerment can have different meanings for different people and contexts. In the current study, it was important for the researcher to understand how the empowerment process might have taken place for the counsellors of the CCO without assuming that it would follow a predictable pattern. By adopting a qualitative approach, the researcher was able to gain an in-depth understanding of the counsellors' experiences.

A criticism of qualitative research relates to the fact that it places a high degree of trust in the researcher to produce results that are objective and unbiased (Neuman, 2000). Within this section, the steps that the researcher took to ensure that trustworthy results were produced are described.

*Participants and sampling*

In keeping with the nature of this study, which was to investigate the perceptions of a specific group of people, sampling was purposive as opposed to random (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). At the time that this study commenced, the CCO was staffed by seven lay counsellors who have been part of the service since its inception. It was planned that all seven counsellors would form the sample for this study. This is in keeping with a qualitative approach, which aims to gather in-depth and rich data on a small number of cases (Lyons, 2000). In relation to studies of empowerment, Rappaport (1987) has supported the idea of a small sample by suggesting that it is possible to learn as much from the study of one setting or a few people over time as from the study of large numbers of people.

Although the sample is specific to the particular community from which it was drawn, the results will be in-depth and thorough and it is hoped they will be useful to the community. The counsellors in the study may be able to use the results to understand if there are constraints that are preventing them from engaging fully in the process of

counselling. In addition, other projects that are similar to the CCO may be able to use aspects of the study to understand how the process of empowerment might take place.

The fact that all seven counsellors were to be included was significant and would have added to the relevance of the data generated, in that, the seven represent the entire population. It was hoped that the data could therefore be seen as fully representative of the views of all involved in the counselling service. By using the whole population of counsellors, the researcher would ensure that the sample selected represented the views of all the participants involved in the CCO (Everatt, 2000). This would provide a measure of certainty that the results of the study are a thorough analysis of the processes that are taking place within the CCO. The researcher would have a strong basis on which to build recommendations for improvement, based on the fact that the opinions of all stakeholders have been taken into account. The research process however, was not a smooth one and two of the potential participants declined to participate in the interviews without providing a reason. This may have impacted on the results of the research in that the two may be holding valuable information regarding the CCO and their perceptions of their own empowerment within the organisation.

All of the participants were coloured women in the age range of 40-50 years. Some of the participants reported that they had grown up in the area where the CCO operates and therefore, had first-hand experience of many of the issues faced by their clients. One of the participants has worked in schools in the area as a teacher and another one is married to a person who grew up in the area. Three of the participants are employed full-time in the banking sector. One of the participants has recently become self-employed and is in the process of establishing a business. Another participant is a qualified teacher and is currently employed as a school counsellor. She is also in the process of completing an honours degree in educational psychology. Since all of the counsellors are involved in formal work on weekdays, counselling for the CCO takes place on Saturdays. All of the CCO counsellors are non-paid volunteers.

*Data -gathering*

Data was gathered by means of semi-structured interviews. The researcher attempted to arrange a meeting with all of the potential participants and the secretary of the CCO to explain the purpose of the research and invite participation. Due to the participants' time constraints, the meeting did not take place and a meeting was held with just the secretary of the group. At this meeting, the secretary was given information sheets to distribute to the participants. The information sheet (see Appendix A) explained the purpose of the research and indicated that participation would be voluntary. It was clearly stated in the information sheet that future participation in the CCO would not be affected should the participants decline to be involved in the research. Once the participants had received the information sheets, the researcher contacted all of them telephonically to determine if they were willing to agree to the interview. Five of the potential participants agreed and convenient times were arranged.

*The interview*

The interviews took place at venues and times convenient for the participants. Three of the interviews took place at the participants' homes, one at the participant's place of work and the fifth at a neutral meeting point. The interviews were approximately one hour long. At the interview, the researcher handed each of the participants an informed consent form (appendix B) which explained to them that participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw from the study at any point, that they could refuse to answer any questions without penalty and that they would not receive any direct benefit from the research. In addition, it was stated that their responses would remain confidential.

Breakwell (2000) has described interviewing as an essential part of social research. Interviewing as a means to gather data is one of the most frequently used methods in the qualitative paradigm (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). This is most likely because an interviewing process enables the researcher to develop in-depth knowledge of the participants' behaviour within the context that it occurs. In addition, the participant is

able to explain to the researcher the meaning of his /her behaviour (Seidman, 1991). Thus, the outcome of the interview fulfils the purpose of qualitative research, which is to gather in-depth data. In the current study the use of an interview was deemed the most appropriate method, as the study of empowerment requires a thorough understanding of the context as well as the meaning for the individuals concerned.

As the name implies, the semi-structured interview (see appendix C) contained certain pre-determined questions that guided the researcher during the interviews, but also allowed for deviations from the standard questions. This was done in order to record any information that the participants were willing to provide, that could be related to the theme of empowerment. Questions required open-ended responses, so that participants were not forced into "yes" or "no" responses as these kinds of fixed answers would not have revealed the depth of the participants' perceptions (Breakwell, 2000). The use of a structured interview with only fixed questions would have restricted the participants and prevented them from revealing their true perceptions (Breakwell, 2000). Open-ended questions also allow respondents to expand on their answers, express feelings, motives or behaviour spontaneously (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991).

The surveyed literature guided the type of questions posed and those included were relevant in eliciting information relating to the theme of empowerment and specifically, PE. Prior to the interviews, the questions were presented to the supervisor of this report as well as an expert in the field of community psychology for their comments and suggestions.

*Data analysis*

All of the interviews were recorded and, on completion, were transcribed verbatim in order for analysis to be conducted. The researcher used content analysis to analyse the data that was generated. Content analysis can be viewed as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 492). Babbie & Mouton describe two types of

content analysis: conceptual analysis, also known as thematic content analysis, and relational analysis. The researcher made use of thematic content analysis.

The process of thematic content analysis involved reading and re-reading the transcripts in a systematic manner. Units of meaning were then assigned to the sentences and phrases (Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). These units of meaning were given labels or codes. Finally, the codes were grouped in the categories or themes that are pertinent to the research question. These categories represent the themes that the researcher uncovered, based on the relevant literature in the field of empowerment. Once the process of coding and categorisation into themes had taken place, the researcher was required to analyse the findings as a whole (Henning et al., 2004). This involved questioning the findings against what the researcher expected to find, understanding the relationships between the categories, becoming aware of missing information and analysing unexpected information that emerged. Thus, content analysis enables the researcher to develop new theories and test hypotheses (Wilson & Hammond, 2000).

The prevalence of pertinent themes, as determined by the thematic content analysis, allowed the researcher to make inferences about the proposed link between empowerment and the counsellors' experiences in the CCO (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). These links will be discussed in chapter five.

Content analysis was deemed an appropriate method to employ in this research as it has a number of advantages, which have been described by Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991). Firstly, the researcher does not require extensive training in the methodology. Secondly, there is little capital investment, as it requires only the time of the researcher. In addition, in the event of information being missed during the analysis, the researcher is able to return to the data and add additional information.

Despite these advantages, an issue that sometimes arises with content analysis is the potential for different analysts to generate different results (Rosenthal and Rosnow, 1991). This may occur, as it is common in qualitative research, for the researcher to

report the data from his/her own perspective (Elliot et al., 1999). In the current study, the researcher may have been over-inclusive in reporting on themes relating to empowerment, as this is what she hoped to uncover. To guard against this, the researcher requested an independent analyst to analyse the transcripts. The researcher's results were then compared with those generated by the independent analyst to ensure that major discrepancies did not occur.

These potential pitfalls in qualitative research and content analysis required the researcher to carefully consider the validity of her investigation and results.

## Validity

The subject of validity involves issues of truth and knowledge (Kvale, 1996.) According to Kvale (1996), validity, in a quantitative sense, is concerned with whether research actually measures that which it claims to. Since the current research employs a qualitative approach, validity is viewed in broader terms. In this case, validity is concerned with whether a particular method investigates that which it claims to.

In the current study, the researcher aimed to investigate the perceptions of the research participants with regards to their involvement in the CCO and how they viewed their empowerment. What this implies is that the researcher did not aim to collect data that would represent an absolute truth, as would be the case in traditional positivist research. In positivist research, the aim is to develop knowledge which is believed to be the one correct view, the absolute reflection of reality (Kvale, 1996). The researcher in the current study viewed the issue of validity in post-modern terms, where knowledge is seen as a social construction of reality (Kvale, 1996). According to Seidman (1991), the goal of the interview process in qualitative research is to develop an understanding of how the participants understand and make meaning of their experiences. If the interview assists the participant to do this, a large part of validity has been established (Seidman, 1991). Thus, in the current study, the researcher aimed to give the participants the opportunity to

reflect on their experiences and describe to the researcher the meaning these particular experiences had for them.

The adoption of a post-modern view of validity does not allow the researcher to dispense with more traditional methods for ensuring validity. The researcher has a responsibility to produce coherent and persuasive knowledge claims that can be defended and can survive falsification attempts (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994; Kvale, 1996). In achieving this goal, Kvale (1996) emphasises the need for the researcher to deal with issues of validity continually in the process of the construction and implementation of the research process. The researcher is required to check, question and theorise (Kvale, 1996). In the current study, the researcher attempted to validate findings based on tactics proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994) for testing and confirming findings. These included:

- Checking for representativeness. In this study, the five interviews were compared against each other and the themes that were present most frequently were reported on.
- Analysing the possibility of the researcher having an effect on the participants' responses. This involved analysing the process of the interviews. The researcher was required to pay attention to the participants' responses, how they approached the interview and their willingness to disclose important information.
- Triangulation, which involved using an independent analyst to view the data and then comparing these findings with those of the researcher.
- Analysing any possible outliers or exceptions that emerged from the analysis and seeking explanations for these. In the current study, the researcher noted that the participants expressed quite different views with regards to their perceptions of their work for the CCO. It was important to understand and discuss how these different views fitted together and provided answers to the research questions. This is discussed in Chapter five. The process of analysing these multiple views has been described as crystallisation (Kvale, 1996). Crystallisation enables the researcher to develop a deep and complex understanding of the issue under investigation (Kvale, 1996).

- Looking for negative evidence which could disprove any conclusions reached. The findings of the current study show that the participants did experience being psychologically empowered in many ways. Despite this, there was some evidence that indicated that they lacked empowerment in certain areas. The researcher was required to explain and discuss how empowerment could seem possible in some aspects, but did not exist in relation to other aspects.

The researcher also considered the issue of pragmatic validity. According to Kvale (1996, p. 250), a pragmatic approach "implies that truth is whatever assists us to take actions that produce the desired results." Thus, research results are considered valid in a pragmatic sense if they enable action to be taken. This is of particular relevance in the South African context where the very pressing needs of disadvantaged communities need to be addressed through research projects (Henning et al., 2004). In the current study, the results will be considered valid in the pragmatic sense if they are used to empower the members of the CCO to continue with their work or to transfer their skills to other contexts. In addition, programmes that share a similar context with the CCO may be able to use aspects of the research to understand how their members may be empowered.

*Validity of the interview*

As the semi-structured interview was the method employed to gather data, the researcher had to ensure that the interview generated valid data. Interviews are often criticised for producing data that is not verifiable as participants may not give true reports (Kvale, 1996). To prevent this from happening, the researcher was required to pay attention to the interview process and how it was implemented. Establishing rapport with participants was a critical part of the process as this assisted them to feel comfortable within the interview and they were able to share their perceptions without fear of judgement. The fact that participants participated in the interviews voluntarily gave the researcher a degree of certainty that they were willing to share their perceptions freely and that would not give false accounts.

It was also important for the researcher to pay significant attention to the interview schedule and ensure that questions posed were relevant in eliciting data relating to participants' perceptions of their empowerment within the CCO. This was done by surveying the literature on empowerment and constructing questions based on this. For further validation, the questionnaire was checked by the researcher's supervisor as well as an independent reader within the Psychology Department at the University of the Witwatersrand.

*Generalisability*

Generalisability concerns the degree to which research results obtained can be generalised to other situations. In quantitative research, the researcher aims to produce results that can be generalised universally (Kvale, 1996). Thus, generalisabilty is expressed in terms of a probability coefficient. This coefficient indicates in statistical terms the degree of certainty that the researcher can have in relation to the applicability of the research to the population in general. In the current study, with its qualitative approach, the researcher adopted a post-modern view in relation to the issue of generalisability. Post-modernism shifts from the quest for knowledge that is universally applicable and aims at developing knowledge that is context-specific (Kvale, 1996). In keeping with this aim, the researcher viewed generalisation in terms of analytic generalisation (Kvale, 1996). This form of generalisation places the responsibility for determining generalisability of findings in the hands of the reader. Thus, the researcher makes the context of the research explicit and the reader is enabled to use reasoned judgement to determine if his or her situation is comparable to that described by the researcher.

*The researcher's role*

In terms of validity, the researcher was required to consider the important issue of the differences between the participants and herself and how the participants may perceive

these differences (Lykes, 1997). The researcher is a white person from a privileged background while the participants are coloured and mostly come from the disadvantaged area where they work. This difference could have had an effect on the participants' willingness to share their experiences openly. The researcher attempted to deal with this issue by being as open with the participants as possible regarding her intentions, the purpose of the research and the exact involvement required from the participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition, the researcher spent a great deal of time establishing rapport with the participants so that they could be comfortable sharing their experiences. When viewing the data, it is useful for the researcher to consider whether it is likely that the participants gave true accounts, as this could impact on the validity of the interview and conclusions reached (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Most of the participants appeared to enjoy the interviews and one participant expressed that the interview had given her the opportunity to celebrate herself and the work she has done for the CCO. Thus, the researcher was relatively confident that, despite the differences between the participants and herself, the participants were comfortable in sharing their experiences.

Ethical Considerations

While it was not envisaged that major psychological trauma would be caused by the interviews, the researcher was sensitive to any adverse reactions from participants. If any such reactions had occurred, the researcher would have recommended to the counsellors that they be referred for psychological intervention. Participants would have been referred to Lifeline and the researcher would have ensured that the necessary arrangements were made. The researcher did not observe any negative reactions from the participants and did not deem it necessary to recommend psychological intervention.

Although it was hoped that the counsellors would be willing to participate in the research, it was made clear that, if they did not participate, this would not, in any way, impact negatively on their participation in the CCO project. Two of the potential participants declined to participate and the researcher did not attempt to coerce them. The five participants who granted interviews agreed voluntarily. It was also made clear to

participants that there were no benefits accruing from their participation in the research. Participants were asked to sign a consent form (see appendix B), which indicated that they had read and understood these conditions.

Participants were informed that anonymity was not possible but their confidentiality would be maintained. This was ensured by the fact that only the researcher and her supervisor had access to the recorded interviews. Interviews were transcribed and, on completion of the researcher's study and after qualifying, all tapes were to be destroyed.
A report summarising the research results will be made available to members of the CCO on request, but all identifying details of individual respondents will be removed. Although quotes are used in this report, identifying details are removed so that the participants will be unable to identify their colleagues from the statements that were made.

## *Chapter Five*

# RESULTS PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

## Introduction

This chapter discusses the results from the content analysis of the five interview transcripts by linking them with relevant literature. A synthesis of the analysis conducted by the researcher, as well as that by the independent analyst yielded four core themes that suggested answers to the research questions. These themes are:

- Counsellors' beliefs about themselves;
- PE at the interactional level;
- Behavioural changes in the participants; and
- Participants' perceptions of the CCO as an organisation.

Each of the core themes is divided into sub-themes which will be discussed in the sections that follow. Quotes that illustrate the perceptions of the participants will be provided. A table summarising the main themes and sub-themes is provided in the appendices section at the end of this report.

## Theme 1: Counsellors' beliefs about themselves

All research participants commented on the impact that their involvement in the CCO had on the beliefs that they hold about themselves. This was expressed in five sub-themes which are discussed in the following section. The sub-themes are:

- Previous traumas or life challenges that influenced beliefs about self;
- Perceptions regarding own self-worth and importance of self-care;
- Belief in ability to cope with life challenges; and
- Beliefs about self in relation to others.

*Previous traumas or life challenges that influenced beliefs about self*

McWhirter (1991) has described powerlessness as the outcome of living with systematic disadvantages and limitations to individual growth. Powerless individuals are unable to rise above these limitations that hamper their growth and progress. All participants, with the exception of one, alluded to traumas or other life difficulties that they had experienced prior to their involvement in the CCO. The participants described how these traumas caused them to feel powerless and limited their growth as individuals. These feelings of being powerless can be attributed to the negative beliefs that the counsellors held about themselves.

Participant A explained that that she had been in a relationship where she was "mentally abused". As a result of this difficult relationship, this participant reported that she felt worthless as a person and did not value herself.

Participant B indicated that she had experienced a traumatic incident as a child. She alluded to the fact that it may have been abuse as she described it as similar to the type of incidents experienced by the children she has counselled who are exposed to abusive situations. The trauma experienced by this participant had led to her having little confidence in herself and her abilities.

Participant C explained that, prior to joining the CCO, she was experiencing personal difficulties. She described feeling that she was "in a valley" and felt that everything in her life was "haywire."

When asked if involvement in the CCO had influenced her belief in herself, participant E initially commented that she had never had a "dislike of herself." She mentioned though that, prior to joining the CCO, she frequently suffered from depression and indicated that these times of depression impacted negatively on how she felt about herself and caused her to feel despondent and hopeless.

*Perceptions regarding own self-worth and importance of self-care*

The literature around counselling training has emphasised the need for self-awareness to be a critical part of any counselling training course (Egan, 1990; Brems 2001; Gibson et al., 2002). The development of self-awareness in counsellors assists them to deal with their own issues. This is important as in the counselling process, counsellors' own issues often surface as a result of similar issues raised by their clients (Gibson et al., 2002). The participants described how the CCO training as well as the group meetings assisted them to deal with issues impacting on their own lives. This seemed to have a positive impact on the counsellors. All of the participants, with again the exception of one, alluded to the idea that they had increased feelings of self-worth as a result of becoming more self-aware following the training. Processes that are considered to be empowering should have the effect of causing individuals to have increased feelings of self-worth, self-confidence and self-reliance (van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). It appeared from the responses of the counsellors that the training process led them to experience increased feelings of self-worth.

Participant A described the impact of the training on her perception of her own self-worth as follows:

*"I was very down…. and I felt worthless – you know that feeling, worthless and it just helped me, it really helped me feel like somebody."*

Participant B reported that, following the CCO training course, the confidence she developed in herself was so remarkable that other people immediately noticed the changes in her.

Participant C experienced being part of the CCO as very supportive and this helped her to deal with the issues that were impacting on her personal life. She described how, through learning more about herself in the CCO training course, she learned to accept and love herself.

Participant E mentioned that since attending the CCO training course, she no longer experienced the bouts of depression that she had previously suffered from. She indicated that following the course, she felt better about herself and believed that she had become the "*person that I would want to be*."

It seemed that these feelings of increased self-worth led to a belief in the participants that they were worthy of being cared for. In addition, the CCO training focussed on teaching the counsellors self-care skills. As a result of this, participants B, C and E all mentioned the importance of caring for themselves in order to be caregivers of others. This is important as the literature emphasises the need for counsellors to care for themselves in order to prevent burnout (Brems 2001; Gibson, et al., 2002; Schon et al., 2005).

Participant C expressed the idea of self-care in the following statement:

> *"It actually taught me how to channel. Sometimes you become…you actually so frustrated. It taught me about self-time – that you have to withdraw from everything to regenerate. Because before you just used to just carry on, carry on and not isolate yourself in order to regenerate. You know just taking time-out so that you can strengthen. Because you give out so much to people but you at the end of the day, you have to come back to yourself in order to restore your equilibrium."*

*Belief in ability to cope with own life challenges*

The intrapersonal component of PE refers to how people think about themselves, which includes feeling in control, feeling competent and having a sense of mastery. As a result of these feelings, people who are empowered at this level believe that they are able to exercise influence in the different spheres of their lives (Zimmerman, 1995). With the exception of participant D, all of the participants commented on the fact that, since joining the CCO, they believed that they were more equipped to cope with challenges in their own lives. The participants also described how they felt more confident in being able to exert influence in the different spheres of their lives.

Participant A described how she felt more confident in dealing with her children and applying the skills she had learned in the CCO in coping with her own issues. She acknowledged that at times she still has difficulties, but feels more equipped to solve problems in her life than she did previously.

Participant B described the many ways in which the CCO training equipped her to deal with her own issues, leading to the development of an internal belief that she could cope with numerous difficulties in her life.

> *"It's been excellent 'cos not only did it educate me how to deal with other people but it helped me to help myself."*

Participant C explained that working for the CCO and going through the training course helped her to develop perspective. This increased her confidence and ability to analyse problems in her own life and deal with them with greater effectiveness than she previously had.

Participant E described a difficult relationship between herself and another family member. Prior to attending the CCO training, this participant felt that she could not cope

with the difficulties that this relationship caused in her life. She explained how the training gave her the confidence to deal with such relationships more effectively.

*Beliefs about self in relation to others*

Both participants A and B commented a great deal about their beliefs about themselves and how other people impacted negatively on these beliefs. Although the other participants did not comment on this aspect, the researcher believed that it was important to include this sub-theme bearing in mind Zimmerman's (1995) notion that empowerment has different meanings for different people.

Participant A described how she felt inadequate, compared to other people in her community and how, through the CCO training she was able to develop more confidence in herself. She described this as follows:

> *"The (her name) before was very vulnerable, she was very um, she didn't have confidence in herself, ja she didn't have confidence in herself and I feel different, I feel more confident. I can take anything on and I was like afraid of being amongst people, talking to people because I was always wondering, what will they think about me."*

This newfound confidence described by the participant indicates a dramatic shift in her perceptions about herself. It also reflects the notion that those that are empowered develop an increased sense of self-confidence, self-worth and self-reliance (Swift & Levin, cited in Zimmerman, 2000).

Participant B also commented a number of times about how she frequently used to feel inadequate amongst other people. This mostly related to her interactions with people outside of her community who she perceived as being more privileged than herself. This impacted significantly on her relationships and her ability to function in her working

environment. She explained the change in herself, following the CCO training course as follows:

> *"And even my relationships. I used to worry what people think of, wonder do they think I'm this type of a person or that and honestly now I don't care…not that I don't care but it doesn't concern me that much anymore what people think, how people feel about me…its now more about how I feel about myself. I know who am I and what I'm capable of, the special person I am…and so on."*

Research has shown that individuals who perceive themselves as powerless find it difficult to break out of this cycle when they compare themselves to other individuals or communities who they perceive as being more privileged than they are (Smith, 1983). It was therefore important that participant B ceased to compare herself to others and developed a sense of self-confidence that was not dependent on other individuals' perceptions.

*Perceptions about ability to counsel*

The previous sub-themes have described how the counsellors developed an increased sense of self-worth, self-confidence and self-reliance. The literature (van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004) describes how, as a result of the development of these self-beliefs, individuals are able to recognise their own skills and resources. All five of the participants commented on the fact that, following the CCO training, they felt adequately equipped to help others through a counselling process. All participants also alluded to the fact that, although they had frequently been called upon to assist others, the counselling training enabled them to do this in a professional and more constructive way. It seemed that the counsellors had some of the skills necessary prior to attending training but, through the training, they were able to identify these skills within themselves and build on the foundation that already existed. This is important, as the literature has highlighted that empowerment efforts should build on skills that already exist within the community (McWhirter, 1991).

Participant A also commented on the fact that she believed that others in her community would not approve of her desire to counsel others. Once she felt adequately equipped to conduct counselling, she was no longer concerned about this issue and approached counselling in a confident manner.

> ***Researcher:*** *"And prior to being invited to attend the counselling skills course, did you ever think about doing something like that before?"*
>
> ***Participant:*** *"No, no I never… I always think that… you know what will people say if I want to help them. They won't approve of it but now I feel different."*

Participants B, D and E believed that the counselling training confirmed for them that they did in fact have the qualities necessary to be good counsellors, where previously, they had not been certain. This indicates that they could recognise their own skills and resources (van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004).

*Concluding comments on theme one*

It appears that all of the participants experienced a change in their beliefs about themselves. It was notable that some of the participants reported less of an impact on their beliefs than the other participants did. This may be as a result of the fact that these participants did not experience the same feelings of disempowerment as described by the participants who experienced a dramatic change in their self-beliefs. This is not surprising as the participants who described the dramatic change also described feeling disempowered prior to their CCO involvement. Despite the different descriptions of the change in their beliefs, it seemed clear that all of the participants experienced benefits from the CCO training as outlined above. This is supported by literature which indicates that different people will have different levels of empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995).

Theme 2: Psychological empowerment at the interactional level

The researcher posed questions to the participants regarding changes that they noticed in themselves following CCO training and involvement. In response to this, the participants all raised issues that linked to the interactional component of PE (Zimmerman, 1995). According to Zimmerman, empowerment at this level refers to the understanding that individuals develop about their community and related socio-political issues. In addition, the development of skills also occurs in individuals who are empowered at this level. The responses of the participants are clustered into the four sub-themes described below. These sub-themes are:

- Counselling skills development;
- Life skills development;
- Development of critical awareness relating to community; and
- Development of critical awareness relating to counsellors' personal lives.

*Counselling skills development*

All of the participants commented extensively on the positive impact of the CCO training in terms of developing their counselling skills. All of them, with the exception of participants D and E, had not been exposed to training of this sort before. Participant D, who is a teacher by profession, had some of the skills prior to attending the training. She expressed though, that the training built on these skills and helped her to extend them. Participant E had previously been exposed to a very brief counselling skills training, but the CCO training was her first formal exposure to counselling skills training and she reported that it was very useful in terms of developing counselling skills.

In general, the participants reported the following types of skills that were imparted to them through the CCO training: identifying problems quickly; analytical skills–

understanding the client's problem; listening skills; using body language to show interest in the counselling situation; and facilitation skills - which involves guiding the client towards a solution.

All participants commented extensively on the very important issue of advice-giving versus facilitating within the counselling situation. Participant D described the importance of this learning for herself as follows:

> *" …prior to my experience with the CCO, I always thought that counselling was having to solve the problem. Having to be able to have a solution for every little thing. Through the training we learned that you basically – it's about being there for the person, not necessarily solving their problem."*

It appeared that the training of counselling skills was a successful process. This was illustrated in the descriptions that the counsellors gave of the skills that they had learned. The skills that were mentioned are similar to those that are described by various authors who have presented models that can be easily transferred to lay counsellors (Egan, 1990; Brems, 2001; Nelson-Jones, 2002). While the different authors use slightly different terminology in describing these skills, the various models are composed of the same type of skills. These skills are: building relationships with clients, attending/listening, demonstrating empathy, facilitating storytelling, facilitating change and self-care skills.

*Life skills development*

All of the participants reported that, in addition to learning counselling skills, they developed skills which enriched their own lives and helped them to cope more effectively with life challenges. It seemed that the self-awareness training, which forms part of the counselling skills training, assisted the participants to become more aware of issues impacting on them. This is not surprising, as the literature about counselling training indicates that counsellors undergoing training are likely to develop an increased sense of self-awareness and understanding (Egan, 1990; Szymanska, 2002). In learning how to

assist others to solve their problems, the counsellors reported that they learned skills which assisted them to deal with their own issues first.

The types of skills which participants alluded to in the interviews were the following:

- **Parenting skills** – All of the participants have children and all of them, with the exception of participant E, commented on the improvement in their ability to parent their children. It appeared that the counsellors were able to transfer their counselling skills to this area of their lives. Being able to listen more attentively assisted the counsellors to become more sensitive to their children's needs. It seemed that, following training, the counsellors were able to empower their children to manage their own problems. They reported that this appeared to be a superior way of assisting their children, rather than telling them what to do, which often led to their children withdrawing.

- **Conflict management skills** –Learning how to deal with conflict had a profound impact on the counsellors' ability to deal with life issues. Specifically, participants A & B mentioned the important issue of learning when to engage in conflict and when to avoid it. Participant A spoke of her difficulty in being assertive. It seemed that following the training, she was able to assert her own needs in a way that did not infringe on the rights of others. She reported that this led to an improvement in her relationships. Participants C & E spoke of their ability to use conflict management skills in difficult relationships with close family members.

- **Leadership skills**- Prior to involvement in CCO training, Participant A was unemployed and struggling to support her family. Having completed the training, this participant developed leadership skills, which assisted her to become self-employed. In addition, she became motivated to handle the administrative work for the CCO and developed the confidence and skill to engage with others and promote the services of the CCO. Participants B, C and E all reported how the

development of leadership skills assisted them a great deal at work. This ability was noticed by participant B's employer to the extent that she was promoted to management level. She reported that the skills she learned in the CCO training assisted her in her management duties.

- **Problem-solving skills –** All of the participants commented on their increased ability to solve problems in all areas of their lives following CCO training. It seemed that they developed the ability to analyse situations and see them from multiple perspectives, taking into account other people's opinions (Zimmerman, 1995). Participant E commented that listening taught her:

*"Also to look at things from a different angle. Because sometimes you just think your way of thinking is the correct way, which it is not. You can sit and also take in other ideas from everybody else."*

Empowerment literature places emphasis on the learning of skills as this enables individuals to take control of their issues of concern (McWhirter, 1991; Fawcett et al., 1995). It appeared from the participants' reports that the skills that they developed assisted them to be in greater control of their lives.

*Development of critical awareness relating to community*

Zimmerman (1995) postulates that an important aspect of developing PE involves the growth in individuals of a critical awareness relating to their communities. This implies developing an understanding of the norms and values applicable within the community. In addition, individuals also need to understand behavioural options in the community in the context in which they operate, which empowers them to be able to act within these options (Zimmerman, 1995). All of the participants commented on the awareness that they developed regarding the community in which they operate following the CCO training. It seemed that they developed an in-depth understanding of the psychosocial

issues that affect the community. Being aware of these issues led to a greater sensitivity within the counsellors regarding the needs of the community. This is important, as empowerment efforts must always be geared towards meeting the needs of the community and should not be imposed (Tomlinson & Swartz, 2002; van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). Participant D, in particular, raised a pertinent issue relating to how psychological services are perceived in the community:

> *"I think in the community where we were, counselling and psychology at that point in time, I must say is viewed as you know, you being crazy. You know there's something wrong with you. There's all the negatives attached to it, you know. So the people didn't see it as just something that would help them, benefit the community."*

It is this type of awareness that forms the basis of interventions that are able to meet the needs of the community at the level at which the community is able to accept them (van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004).

*Development of critical awareness relating to counsellors' personal lives*

It seemed that the critical awareness that the counsellors developed with regards to issues within the community also had an impact on their own lives. Understanding how the community operated helped them to see how the issues within the community had impacted on them. One of the participants described how, through the CCO training, she learned that she was a victim of an abusive relationship which had caused her to feel worthless and disempowered. This enabled her to let go of the notion that she was the problem within the relationship. This is important as empowerment theory postulates that the powerless should not be blamed for their situation and should be made aware of how societal structures contribute to their sense of being disempowered (McWhirter, 1991).

The other four participants related how they began to understand their roles within the community as well as in their relationships with others. This understanding led to a realisation that they could choose to act differently to how they had previously in order to gain greater control of their lives. Participant E explained how the training assisted her to develop an understanding of how external factors impacted on her:

> *"..I mean there were lots of things I could see that was happening in my life. I just didn't understand why it was happening. How it actually fitted. And with the training I could understand and see where it came from. I must say I will gladly give up everything to go and help another person. You get to a point where you can say yes, I can help the person, but I must help myself."*

Participant B described how she learned that she was over-dependent on various family members. This resulted in an inability to distinguish her own needs, separate from her family. By beginning to understand the dynamics of these relationships, the participant was able to become more independent and self-reliant.

*Concluding comments on theme two*

From the above discussion it is apparent that the participants benefited a great deal from the skills training that the CCO provided. In addition to enabling them to counsel others, the counsellors were able to transfer the skills in a way that benefited their relationships with others. The participants also demonstrated the development of a critical awareness of issues that impacted on their community as well as on their own lives. It was interesting to note though that this critical awareness did not extend to an understanding of how broader political and structural issues may impact on the community or on their own lives (Taylor, 1995). This corresponds with a study by Stacki and Monkman (2003) conducted with women from marginalised groups. The findings of this study indicated that, although it was possible for the participants to improve the quality of their lives, breaking down structural barriers that caused social inequities was a difficult process.

It is also possible that political and structural issues did not emerge in the interviews due to the perceived differences between the researcher and the participants. The participants, who would have experienced social inequity during the apartheid years, may not have felt comfortable discussing issues of privilege and race with the researcher who is white and, therefore, a member of the group who was perceived to be responsible for causing social inequities in the past. The attitude of the participants towards the researcher was one of politeness and respect. It is possible that they did not want to offend the researcher by raising these issues. The literature highlights the role played by social inequity in terms of the lack of resources in leading to mental health problems (Taylor, 1995; van Wyk & Naidoo; 2006). Impoverished communities that experience social inequity in the form of social marginalisation, inadequate housing, malnutrition, violence and inadequate health care are likely to experience many mental health problems (Van Wyk & Naidoo, 2006). Thus, it is likely that issues of social inequity play a role in the causes of the psychosocial problems prevalent in the community served by the CCO. Lack of attention to these issues could lead to difficulty in terms of resolving the problems facing the community.

Content analysis allows the researcher to generate new hypotheses and the researcher re-examined the transcripts to uncover other reasons for the lack of discussion around issues of social inequity and privilege. It is also possible that the participants did not raise these issues because the researcher did not explore them. The interview schedule did not cover these issues and the participants may not have thought of raising them, as they might have believed that it was more important to provide information that was relevant to the questions that were posed. The fact that these issues were not explored could be viewed as a limitation of this study.

In summary, it appears that the participants indeed developed a greater critical awareness of issues, but this either did not extend to an understanding of the extensive impact of structural inequities, or the research did not adequately cover this issue.

Theme 3: Behavioural changes in the participants

Psychological empowerment literature has emphasised that PE is not a static trait. Most models that describe the process of empowerment refer to the fact that empowered individuals not only report feeling empowered, but demonstrate this through actions that they take (McWhirter, 1991; Laverack & Wallerstein, 2001; Zimmerman, 1995, 2000).

The behavioural component of PE brings together the intrapersonal and interactional components leading to individuals taking action in order to influence certain outcomes. In the interviews, all of the participants described ways in which their new-found beliefs about themselves, as well as the skills that they had learned, had an impact on how they behaved. In many cases, this had a positive effect on their relationships with others. The participants described issues that the researcher clustered under the five sub-themes that are discussed below. These sub-themes are:

- Changes in counselling behaviour;
- Action within the employment sphere;
- Changes in behaviour in close personal relationships;
- Community participation and action; and
- Responses of others in the participants' context.

*Changes in counselling behaviour*

The skills that the participants learned from the CCO training equipped them to engage in the counselling process in a confident manner. Participant E reported that work colleagues who had personal problems often requested her assistance in dealing with these problems. Prior to training, she would refer these people to counselling organisations. Following her exposure to the CCO training, she explained that she now feels equipped to assist and does not hesitate to counsel others when the need arises.

All of the participants reported that they changed their behaviour within the counselling setting after exposure to the CCO training. The most notable change for the participants was that they ceased to give advice and began to listen to their clients more. They became more open to hearing issues from their clients' perspectives without passing judgement. The counsellors felt that this was more respectful to their clients. They reported that they adopted a facilitative approach within the counselling situation. Participant C captured these ideas in the following statement:

> *"Before you used to say to this person…'Do this man! Do that!' Now you realise you cannot just tell a person 'do that' because basically everybody knows the answer to your problem. It's in there. Your role is basically just facilitating".*

All the participants reported that the change in their counselling behaviour led to positive outcomes for their clients. Although the CCO is not currently very active and some of the counsellors reported that they did not have a great deal of exposure to actual counselling, the participants believed that, when they had an opportunity to counsel, their clients benefited from this process. This supports the findings of Stone & Levine (1985) who conducted a study of individuals who were involved in community action. Despite not fully achieving their goals, the fact that the individuals were involved led to their empowerment. According to the participants in the current study, the CCO has not fully achieved its goals, yet the actual involvement has led to increased feelings of self-confidence and empowerment, enabling them to take action.

*Action within the employment sphere*

Zimmerman (1995) has indicated that while people could be empowered in one area of their lives, they may not experience empowerment in other domains. In contrast, it appeared from the reports of the participants that all of them not only felt empowered to counsel, but also experienced being empowered in other areas of their lives and were able to proactively influence these areas.

Involvement in the CCO appeared to have had an impact on all of the participants in terms of their careers. Participant A was unemployed when she became involved with the CCO. Following CCO training, she reported that her increased self-confidence led to her ability to take action to start her own business.

Participant B reported a profound change that occurred in how she behaved in her work setting, leading to a positive outcome. This participant described how she was able to assert herself at work and demonstrate the leadership skills that she attained through the counselling training. As a result, she received a promotion to management level. As a manager, she described how she used her counselling skills to interact with staff who worked for her. Through using these skills, participant B empowered her staff and assisted many of them in dealing with personal issues that impacted on their work.

Participant C, who also works in the position of manager, reported that she was also able to use her counselling skills to empower her staff.

Following CCO training, participant D was able to take action to change her career direction. The CCO training provided her with the confidence in her ability to counsel and as a result, she was enabled to embark on the process of studying, so as to qualify as an educational psychologist.

Participant E did not report that her personal career was significantly impacted on following the CCO training. However, she described how the training enabled her to counsel many of her work colleagues who were experiencing personal difficulties.

It appeared from the reports given by the participants that, not only did they use their skills to progress within their own careers, but they were able to reach out to others and encourage their empowerment. This is not surprising, as research has shown that empowered individuals are able to support the empowerment of others within their communities as a result of their own empowerment (McWhirter 1991).

In addition to describing ways in which their careers were enhanced following exposure to training, all of the participants took action to develop themselves further. In most cases, the self-development involved attending courses to improve counselling skills. Although participant C did not mention any ways in which she was developing herself, she indicated that she became more proactive in managing problems within her life, thus, improving the overall quality.

*Changes in behaviour within close personal relationships*

Van Vlaenderen and Neves (2004) have proposed that people who are psychologically empowered experience a change in their perceptions of their relationships with others. As a result of this, their social settings go through a process of change.

An area where participants appeared to be significantly enabled to act to influence outcomes was within their personal relationships. Participants A, B, C and E all described issues relating to difficult relationships with family members such as children, aging parents and in-laws. Following the CCO training, all reported that they realised that they could behave differently within these relationships and thus influence the outcome. Behaving differently involved bringing together their critical awareness of their own role within relationships as well as acquired skills such as problem-solving, listening and facilitating. All reported that their changes in behaviour led to improvements within these relationships. In addition, participants A and C described how, through their counselling skills, they were able to empower their children to become better equipped to deal with their own problems in future.

Although participant D did not raise any issues in terms of difficult personal relationships, she indicated that she too was able to apply the skills she learned as a counsellor in raising her children. She described how she is now able to listen more actively and is more attuned to identifying issues that impact on her children.

*Community participation and action*

The counsellors' development of a critical awareness relating to issues impacting on the community led to them becoming more attuned to needs within the community. This, combined with skills learned, enabled them to take action to participate in community organisations. Initially, all participants were actively involved in the CCO. However, for various reasons, most are no longer involved. Currently, only participants A and C are involved on a limited basis with the CCO. A discussion of the factors relating to this will be undertaken under theme four.

Despite difficulties in terms of carrying out her duties for the CCO, participant A is motivated to continue trying to promote the work of the CCO. What is remarkable about this is that prior to her exposure to training, she reported that she would not have felt confident to speak to people and promote the services of the organisation. With her newfound self-confidence, this participant is now able to fulfil the role of secretary within the CCO and actively promotes the services of the organisation through networking with the schools in the area and attempting to recruit clients.

Despite lack of ongoing involvement with the CCO, participants B, D and E have all used their skills to take action to participate in community work. Participant B, in particular, became very active in her community in initiating a drug awareness programme. As well as using her counselling skills in this new organisation, she demonstrated that she had the ability to adopt a leadership role. She reported that she works with people who are professionals and have tertiary qualifications which she lacks. In the past, she would have perceived herself as inadequate in comparison to her colleagues. She reported though that within this new role, she acts with confidence. Through using her skills and experience gained from the CCO, she has had a major impact on the formation and development of this new organisation.

Participant E has continued with counselling work for a different organisation within her community. In addition, she contributes time to other projects that assist underprivileged children. Participant D has undertaken formal studies to qualify as an educational

psychologist. The practical part of her training includes counselling within the same community that the CCO aimed to serve.

Although the CCO has not grown as extensively as the counsellors had hoped, it does appear that the community at large is benefiting from the skills that were imparted to the counsellors and their empowerment. This is in keeping with McWhirter's view that community empowerment efforts should start with the empowerment of a few who can then use their skills to empower others in a ripple effect (McWhirter, 1991).

*Responses of others in the participants' context*

In terms of the changes in behaviour reported by the participants, it is interesting to note that they did not only discuss their perceptions of how they now behave. Many of the descriptions given by the participants of how they had changed, were in relation to how these changes affected their relationships with others. In all cases, it seemed that the people in the participants' environments responded positively to the changes in the participants. This is important, as Riger (1993) raises an important criticism in relation to empowerment. She highlights that people who are empowered may engage in behaviours that could alienate them from their communities. None of the participants reported that they had in any way become alienated from their communities. In fact, all reported that their relationships grew stronger and others around them benefited from the changes that they saw in the participants. In describing how her changed behaviour influenced a relationship with a close family member, participant E said:

> *"…… I mean before it was – we'll speak to each other, but it will turn into a screaming session and I think that's where I actually learnt to really just calm down, and try also not to scream back if she screams I will listen. But I won't say anything; I will go back to her and say: 'you know I really felt hurt at the things you were saying to me.' That was after the training that I was more able to cope with her. Really to live with the situation."*

This is in keeping with McWhirter's assertion that empowering processes should enable individuals to exercise the control they have gained without infringing on the rights of others (McWhirter, 1991).

*Concluding comments on theme three*

From the discussion above, it appears that all of the participants were empowered in a way that enabled them to take action that led to improvements in their own lives as well as for the benefit of others within their communities. The action, however, did not extend to activities that would lead to the breaking down of barriers of social equity. Nevertheless, the efforts undertaken would have had significant benefit for the community. In addition, although the CCO has not experienced significant growth, the skills imparted have benefited the community at large. Many volunteer organisations do not keep their volunteers for long periods, but frequently, these counsellors move to other organisations and thus the community continues to benefit from their newly acquired skills (Tyndall, 1993). It is also notable that it seems that through empowering a few people, others have become empowered in a ripple effect (McWhirter, 1991).

Theme 4: Participants' perceptions of the CCO as an organisation

The previous three themes provided insights that answered research question one. The issues discussed related to the perceptions of the participants regarding their psychological empowerment as a result of involvement with the CCO. Theme four addresses the issues raised by the participants in relation to their perceptions around working for the CCO as an organisation. The sub-themes discussed in this section provide insights into the positive as well as the negative aspects that the counsellors experienced in their work for the CCO. Many of the negative issues raised highlight restraints experienced by the counsellors in the rendering of counselling services within a community context. The discussion that follows will attempt to analyse these restraints. This will be done in order to understand if they are linked to psychological empowerment

or not, thereby answering research question two. The four sub-themes that are discussed below are:

- Counsellors' positive experiences while working for the CCO;
- Role of the professional within the CCO;
- Negative features of the CCO; and
- Counsellors' comments regarding the CCO's lack of progress.

*Counsellors' positive experiences while working for the CCO*

All of the counsellors commented on the fact that they experienced many personal benefits as a result of their involvement with the CCO. In particular, they described the CCO as a support group which provided them with the opportunity to share issues from their own lives and receive guidance from one another and the professional who conducted the CCO training. Three of the participants are from the same area where the CCO conducted counselling. In addition, some of the participants are family members. Having these issues in common created a bond that led to the counsellors' ability to identify with one another and the type of issues they faced in their personal lives. Participant B, in particular, commented on the importance for her that the counsellors shared a similar background and supported one another:

> *"Ja, you know, there was no-one you know, 'you better than me you better than her, I'm better than you,' you know. We were more or less from the same background, we worked wonderful as a team."*

Participant D described how the other counsellors welcomed her into the group and assisted her in developing her counselling skills. Although it was not a very prominent theme, some of the counsellors alluded to the fact that their desire to counsel others is linked to their Christian religious beliefs. Participant D, who recently became a re-born Christian, described the other counsellors as being "spiritually mature." She expressed that her faith was deepened through connection with the other counsellors.

The CCO was created to offer counselling services. The descriptions given by the participants of the workings of the group, however, suggest that the group operated similarly to what the literature describes as a support group (Corey & Corey, 1992). In self-help groups, individuals who have similar difficulties share their experiences and encourage one another by offering advice and support (Corey & Corey, 1992). Most of the participants described difficulties in their lives relating to family relationships and work issues. Within the structure of the CCO, the participants were able to share their difficulties and receive support from one another.

In describing their experiences of working with the CCO, all of the counsellors indicated that they had a strong belief in the goals of the CCO and felt proud to be associated with the organisation. Although three of the participants are no longer involved with the CCO, this sense of pride and belief in the organisation provided them with a strong motivation to pursue the work of the CCO when it was in its formation stage. All of the participants also mentioned the pressing needs within the community. Being part of the CCO appeared to give the counsellors a sense of fulfilment in that they were able to contribute to meeting the community's needs. Thus, despite the fact that the CCO counsellors were not remunerated for their efforts, it appears that they felt rewarded for their contribution to the community. This reflects the view of Tyndall (1993) that volunteer counsellors are likely to feel a sense of fulfilment, despite the lack of physical remuneration.

*Role of the professional within the CCO*

The literature highlights the importance of a professional who acts as a catalyst to initiate the process of empowering individuals or communities (Golden, 1991; Zimmerman, 2000; van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). The role of this person is that of collaborator and empowerment efforts should never be imposed (Balcazar et al., 2004). Ultimately, the powerless should be able to take control of their issues (Rappaport, 1987). To allow this to unfold, the professional's role should entail assisting those being empowered to develop skills and resources necessary to face their issues of concern.

Participants B, C and E commented on the significant impact of the professional who trained the CCO counsellors. The counsellors expressed that they viewed the professional as a role model who inspired them to develop themselves. Participant B expressed this in the following extract:

> *"(Name of the professional), has pushed me a lot. She has really been a great role model in my life. …. She's just studying and studying and I thought wow, you know I can also do that"*

It is also interesting to note that none of the participants who commented on the beneficial impact of the professional have a university education. The professional, on the other hand, is a qualified psychologist with a PhD. This is important as participant B had commented before on how she often felt intimidated and inadequate by people who had more education than her. Her interaction with the professional was different in that she was able to see that she too could develop herself further in a way that she had not previously thought was possible. The literature (Lykes, 1997; Gibson et al., 2001) suggests that communities may reject assistance if they perceive differences between themselves and the professional, particularly if the professional is from a race group that is viewed as the oppressor/previous oppressor. In the current study, the professional involved in the CCO is from the same ethnic background as the counsellors. This may have impacted on the counsellors' view of the professional. It could be speculated that they perceived that, if someone similar to them could be empowered, it was also possible for them to develop themselves and rise above the difficulties of their backgrounds. It is possible that, had a professional from a privileged background provided the input into the CCO, the participants may not have received it as positively as they did.

*Negative features of the CCO*

Despite the many positive benefits described by the counsellors that resulted from their involvement with the CCO, all of them raised issues relating to problems and hindrances that prevented the CCO from operating optimally. The issues raised were the following:

- **Time** – The reality for all the counsellors is that they need to work in order to support their families. Working full-time, or studying, in the case of participant D, leaves little time for the counsellors to engage in community work despite their enthusiasm to do this work.

- **High attrition rate of counsellors** – The lack of time impacted on certain counsellors to the extent that they were forced to resign from the CCO. This impacted on the other counsellors as they had come to rely on the other members for support and assistance with the CCO work. The CCO is not unique in this area. Many community organisations experience the problem of high attrition amongst their workers (Tyndall, 1993; Ngonyama Ka Sigogo & Modipa, 2004).

- **Resources** – Issues such as not having actual premises to counsel from, created problems for the participants in terms of carrying out their work. The counsellors used a room at a community centre. However, this arrangement did not run smoothly and the room was not constantly available. Other authors have suggested that the success of community work is dependent on the availability of resources (Ngonyama Ka Sigogo & Modipa, 2004). It was interesting to note that none of the counsellors mentioned the issue of finances although this was an issue that was raised in Fitchet's (2006) research with the same group of counsellors. This could be because Fitchet's study placed more emphasis on the practical needs of the counsellors than the current study did.

- **Administrative problems** –There are many administrative duties that require attention that are aside from the actual counselling work. Some of these include;

recruiting clients from schools, liasing with the school teachers to ensure that parents have signed consent for their children to attend counselling and arranging suitable times for the counselling sessions. Participant A performs the role of secretary for the group. She indicated that there were difficulties associated with performing these duties in that she did not have sufficient time to attend to them regularly. She also alluded to the fact that she felt alone in having to perform these administrative duties and did not feel fully supported by the other counsellors. Participant E also expressed frustration in that the initiation of the CCO required considerable administration which appeared to be difficult for the group to complete. Participant C expressed her view on why the group was experiencing problems in terms of administrative issues. This is related to the fact that a person who has counselling skills may not necessarily also have the ability to handle the administrative aspects of the counselling service.

*"All the people that is in the CCO….. We mostly had the same character traits. So you need all kinds of people to let the ball go round and that in itself didn't….that is what was lacking. That is what is lacking in this organisation."*

This comment by the participant is not surprising as the literature shows that counsellors frequently struggle with the administrative aspects of offering a counselling service (Tyndall, 1993).

- **Community issues –** While participant D expressed her belief in the CCO as a valuable resource for the community, she also identified the important issue of the community's response to such a service. Despite pressing needs within communities, it is not uncommon for them to reject assistance offered. The CCO counsellors experienced this phenomenon in the fact that clients would frequently not return after only having been exposed to one or two counselling sessions. Participant D suggested that one of the reasons for clients not using the service to their benefit is related to the perceptions that are held in the community regarding counselling. She noted that people who attend counselling are often stigmatised

by their community and viewed as being mentally unstable. This corresponds with findings of a study where counselling services were also offered to individuals from a disadvantaged community (van Wyk & Naidoo, 2006). These authors found that individuals in the community believed that the role of counselling was only to assist people who are suffering from severe mental illness. This perception results in potential clients either, not using the service at all or, terminating counselling prematurely.

The response of the community to the services of the CCO is not unusual. Counsellors in this setting frequently experience clients not returning after 1 or 2 sessions (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Kriegler, 2005). The response of the community is often dependent on whether or not they are included in the planning of the intervention (Ngonyama Ka Sigogo & Modipa, 2004, Van Wyk & Naidoo, 2006). Interventions are more likely to be successful if the community is involved in the planning and inception. While the CCO consisted of members who themselves were part of the community, it is possible that the organisation did not include other stakeholders in the planning and inception of its counselling service. This would make it less likely that the community would be invested in the service offered (Ngonyama Ka Sigogo & Modipa, 2004).

- **Ongoing training –** Although the CCO counsellors have been exposed to further training following their initial basic counselling skills course, participant B felt that she required more frequent training and updates to her skills and knowledge. This participant highlighted an issue that is identified by the literature as being extremely important in terms of retention of counsellors. According to Tyndall (1993), counsellors require ongoing training and supervision in order to feel supported and able to continue with their work. Interestingly, none of the participants commented on the need for supervision. This is in line with Fitchet's (2006) findings with the same group of counsellors. Fitchet speculated that the counsellors may not have commented on the need for supervision as it might not be a requirement because the CCO is currently not performing a great deal of

counselling. It is also possible that the counsellors may not have been exposed to the idea of supervision and their expression of a need for ongoing training also reflected a need for supervision.

*Counsellors' comments regarding the CCO's lack of progress*

The above discussion represents a summary of the participants' perceptions of the negative aspects of the CCO. It was worth noting that the counsellors differed in the way that they expressed these negative aspects. It also appeared that the counsellors differed in how they responded to the difficulties and in the feelings that were evoked in them as a result of the difficulties. The responses given provided some insights into the possible reasons for the lack of progress of the CCO.

Participant A spoke positively about the CCO despite the difficulties experienced in her role, particularly the administrative aspects. She, however, alluded to difficulties in terms of obtaining cooperation from all of the counsellors due to their time constraints. She expressed that she did not believe that the group was able to control the issues that impinge on its ability to do its work.

Participant B gave an extremely positive account of her experience as a member of the CCO. Most of her responses related to the incredibly positive change she experienced in her personal life as a result of the CCO training. She explained that she was no longer directly involved with the CCO because she is now involved in a new community programme. She did not make any negative comments about the CCO or the counsellors.

Participant C was extremely explicit in the expression of the frustration that she felt regarding the fact that the CCO was not currently very active and had not achieved the goals it had set out to. She expressed that she felt extremely disappointed that she had not personally achieved what she had set out to do for the CCO. She also indicated that the reasons for the slow progress of the CCO were related to issues such as lack of time due to work pressures and lack of resources, especially an administrative structure. Although

she expressed that the reasons for the slow progress of the CCO were beyond her control, she also indicated that she felt a “failure” for not having completed what she had set out to do. This participant is still a member of the CCO. Although she is able to apply her skills in other areas of her life, she expressed her ongoing frustration that she is unable to use these skills in the service of the CCO.

Participant D’s response was similar to participant C. She also expressed disappointment that the CCO had not achieved all its goals but felt that this was due to reasons beyond the group’s control. She did not appear to take this as personally as participant C and is no longer involved with the CCO due to her home and study commitments.

Participant E had quite a different response from all of the other counsellors. Although she mentioned positive aspects of the CCO, she was extremely vocal about her disappointment regarding the lack of progress of the organisation. She expressed that she understood the time constraints felt by the counsellors, but had a firm belief that the counsellors’ tendency to make excuses and focus time on irrelevant issues was responsible for holding the group back. She suggested that the group would have functioned better if they had obtained outside assistance with the administrative issues. She did not receive support for this idea as the other counsellors insisted that the administration remains with the group members. Despite this insistence, she described how the counsellors failed to complete tasks assigned to them, thereby, hampering the group’s ability to focus on the counselling. This led to her becoming extremely despondent about the group’s ability to progress, ultimately resulting in her resignation from the CCO.

In analysing the different views expressed by the participants, three important issues were highlighted to the researcher. These issues suggest reasons for the lack of progress of the CCO. The first one relates to the locus of control construct, which is an aspect of personality. According to Lefcourt (1991), those with an internal locus of control believe that they are able to influence outcomes. In contrast, those people who have an external locus of control believe that they are not able to personally influence outcomes.

Empowerment literature suggests that empowering processes have an effect on the locus of control construct (Zimmerman, 2000). Individuals who are psychologically empowered tend to have an internal locus of control. This implies that these individuals believe that they are able to influence outcomes and act in order to do so.

In contrast, those with an external locus of control do not believe that they are able to influence outcomes (Lefcourt, 1991). Most of the participants described how they became empowered in many ways following CCO training. Despite the significant impact on their lives, it appears that some of the participants indicated that they have an external locus of control in relation to their perceptions about the potential of the CCO to progress. It seemed that most did not believe that they could influence the future of the organisation and remained stuck, unable to proceed with achieving their goals.

The second issue relates to the limitations of empowerment in the South African context. Despite the fact that there is a dire need for counselling services in disadvantaged communities, the CCO counsellors experienced difficulty in gaining access to the community to proceed with their counselling work. Often, clients would only attend 1 or 2 sessions, never to return. The difficulties faced by the COO in this regard are not unusual. The literature predicts that this is a likely scenario and that individuals from disadvantaged communities often fail to accept counselling services (Seedat, et al., 2003; Ahmed & Pillay, 2004).

The difficulties faced by individuals involved in community work are well documented. Community work has a reputation of being: “chaotic, frustrating and a-theoretical” (Gibson et al., 2001, p.32). It has been suggested that volunteers in the community face difficulties in their work that seasoned professionals would struggle to overcome and would ultimately lead to their burnout. These difficulties are related to issues such as lack of funding, poor resources and few skills and training (Gibson & Swartz, 2004). These issues were mentioned both in the current study as well as the study conducted by Fitchet (2006). Thus, it appears that the CCO counsellors were facing issues that are commonly experienced by professionals working in community settings. It is not surprising that the

counsellors struggled to overcome these issues in light of the substantial literature that deals with the issue of working within community settings.

A theme that often arises in this literature is the lack of theory which guides Community Psychology (Gibson et al., 2001; Ngonyama ka Sigogo et al., 2004). The lack of theory leads to a situation where individuals in community settings are required to generate solutions without theoretical guidance. It could be hypothesised that lay counsellors, who have not received extensive training, will struggle to resolve issues that professionals have difficulty in overcoming (Gibson et al., 2001).

Thus, although it is possible that some of the participants demonstrated an inability to move forward and influence the progression of the CCO, it also seems plausible that the participants were not incorrect in their belief that circumstances were beyond their control. It is possible that their feelings of helplessness around their inability to influence the future of the CCO is a reflection of the chaos that is often characteristic of community work (Gibson et al., 2001).

As discussed in theme two, the fact that none of the CCO counsellors mentioned issues related to inequities in their community suggests that they may not have developed a critical awareness of the larger societal processes that lead to lack of empowerment amongst their community members. An important aspect of the development of PE is the development of an understanding about how structural inequities contribute to the lack of empowerment experienced by communities (Taylor, 1995; Balcazar et al., 2004). The counsellors' silence around the issues of social inequities suggests that they did not develop a critical understanding of certain issues relating to their community. Another hypothesis that was considered under theme two is that the participants did not raise this issue because the researcher did not mention it. The participants may not have discussed issues of race in light of the fact that the researcher and participants belong to different race groups. Nevertheless, the participants appeared unable to engage with these issues in terms of their work. This suggests that they were not empowered to deal with the issue of

addressing social inequities. Thus, it appears that this could have been a restraint linked to psychological empowerment in the rendering of counselling services.

The third issue relates to the idea suggested earlier; that the CCO functioned as a support group for some of the counsellors allowing them to deal with their own life issues. Despite the difficulties experienced by the group, all of the participants commented on the manner in which the group worked well together and co-operated to achieve tasks in the initial stages of the CCO's existence. Thus, the overall picture was of a group where all participants were treated as equals and were allowed to express themselves freely. This is important, as research has highlighted the importance of teamwork as a success factor in organisations serving the community (Ebersohn et al., 2007). Participant B in particular commented on how all the group members worked together as equals. While there was certainly a benefit to this, it appeared that the group might not have dealt with possible conflict that may have arisen. Participant E, in particular, commented on how frustrated she was that certain group members did not attend to administrative tasks assigned to them. The group may have benefited from appointing a manager who pulled together the different strengths and weaknesses of the group members and was able to address conflict. This is supported by literature which suggests that counsellors require the support of a leader who can take responsibility for making decisions, thereby leaving the counsellors to attend to the actual counselling work (Gibson et al., 2002). It has also been suggested that empowered organisations should create formal roles and responsibilities for its members. This is believed to be a factor in fostering a sense of belonging and adds to the feelings of empowerment of the participants (Rappport 1987). It was not clear from the participants' responses that clear roles and responsibilities were allocated.

In addition, the theory of groups suggests that certain group processes that did not take place may have resulted in difficulties for the CCO in terms of its ability to progress (Corey & Corey, 1992). Groups that offer support only and do not challenge its members, often struggle to move ahead as they do not encourage their members to take risks, which is often necessary for the group to forge ahead (Corey & Corey, 1992). The descriptions

given by the participants, especially participant E, suggests that the group members did not take risks and rather, offered support to one another without challenging each other.

The effect of very real issues such as time and resources cannot be underestimated. Community work is often hindered by lack of resources (Ngonyama Ka Sigogo & Modipa, 2004). However, these are issues that are faced by many community organisations. Participant E alluded to the fact that the other counsellors used these as excuses for the lack of progress of the CCO. While she may have been correct in this assertion, it is possible that the counsellors battled to find solutions to these issues as they were experiencing too much pressure in devoting time to the CCO as well as managing the demands of their personal lives. A more advanced administration structure as well as effective leadership, which would have dealt with the more mundane issues of the running of the CCO, may have enabled the counsellors to focus on the actual counselling (Corey & Corey, 1992; Tyndall, 1993; Gibson et al., 2002).

*Concluding comments on theme four*

During the interviews, the counsellors provided a great deal of information relating to their positive and negative experiences while working for the CCO. It was clear that all of the counsellors had positive experiences while working for the CCO. For most of the counsellors, the CCO functioned as a support group, allowing them to deal with their own issues. The counsellors found that their empowerment was largely facilitated by the input of the professional, who provided the training and acted as a role model for them.

Despite the many benefits experienced, the counsellors also encountered a number of difficulties in their work for the CCO. Most of the counsellors appeared to believe that they were unable to work beyond these difficulties and, despite other indications that they were significantly empowered, it seemed that they had an external locus of control. Literature suggests that psychological empowerment leads to an individual developing an internal locus of control. In addition, it appeared that, although the counsellors developed a critical awareness regarding certain issues relating to their community, they did not

demonstrate that they were empowered to enable them to deal with the issue of the structural inequities that caused the many psychosocial problems in their community. Thus, it appears that there may be restraints in the rendering of counselling services that are linked to PE.

The literature also suggests that effective leadership and administrative structure are critical needs of voluntary counselling organisations. Themes one, two and three have indicated that the counsellors became significantly empowered through their involvement with the CCO. Thus, it seems likely that if their needs in terms of leadership, resources and administration were met, the counsellors may have been more successful in delivering counselling services to their clients, despite the restraints that were linked to PE.

## *Chapter Six*

# LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

## Introduction

This study was undertaken in order to explore the perceptions of a group of lay counsellors with regards to their psychological empowerment. It was hypothesised that the counsellors may have become empowered as a result of their involvement in a counselling service in a disadvantaged community. In addition, the study explored whether there are restraints linked to psychological empowerment in the rendering of counselling services. This final chapter will begin with a discussion of the limitations of the study. Recommendations will then be suggested for future research as well as for the future of the CCO. Finally, the chapter will be concluded by a summary of the findings of the study.

## Limitations

The most important limitation of this study relates to the limited generalisability of the findings. The participants in the study were drawn from a very specific group of people. All of the participants shared a similar background and were from the same race and cultural group. In addition, the psychologist who took responsibility for implementing the empowerment initiative shared a similar background to the participants. This may have influenced their positive reaction to the empowerment initiative. It is important to consider what the impact of an empowerment initiative may be on a different group of people. In addition, a psychologist implementing an empowerment initiative who did not share a similar background to the participants may have had a different impact.

Despite the fact that the findings of the study may be largely limited, this is not viewed as an issue in terms of empowerment theory. An important tenet of empowerment theory is that different groups will not have the same empowerment requirements. Empowerment has different meanings for different individuals and groups. Interventions are required to be adapted to the needs of the target group.

Chapter four of this study discussed the issue of generalisability. It was stated that the findings might not be applicable to other contexts and communities. The responsibility for determining whether the findings could be applicable to other programmes is placed on the reader. Individuals wishing to implement empowerment programmes are required to determine if their programmes are similar to the CCO. If similarities exist, then aspects of the findings may be of relevance.

The current study is not intended to be a form of programme evaluation. However, it could be said that the perceptions of the counsellors provide some indication of the degree of success of the CCO as an empowerment initiative. With this in mind, the current study could be viewed as an evaluation of one aspect of the CCO programme. Evaluation of programmes is considered an important aspect of their ongoing management. Evaluation provides information that can be used in future decision-making relating to the direction of the programme (Lewis et al., 2003). This study could provide information that could be used as input for a programme evaluation of the CCO. It cannot, however, be viewed as a programme evaluation.

The findings of the study also suggest that the researcher may not have given enough attention to the issue of the participants' view of the impact of structural inequities on the community's lack of empowerment.

Despite its limited applicability, the current study could be useful in providing information to guide the future of the CCO. In addition, the findings of the study suggest issues which researchers should consider when evaluating or initiating empowerment programmes. These are discussed below.

## Recommendations

### *Recommendations for the CCO*

The results of this study indicate that the counsellors perceived themselves to be significantly psychologically empowered as a result of their involvement with the CCO. Despite this, the counsellors experienced many difficulties in the rendering of counselling services. The difficulties experienced were related to the following:

- **Administrative structure** – The study has shown that the CCO struggled with attending to the many administrative issues that are necessary in the everyday running of the service. It is possible that, if a supportive administrative structure was in place, the counsellors would be able to focus on their counselling, without having the frustration of attending to administrative issues.

- **Leadership** – The counsellors described how, within the structure of the CCO, they all participated fully as equals. While this suggests that the CCO functioned as an empowered organisation, it seems that the lack of a clear manager was a hindrance to the group. The literature has highlighted the need for a clear leader/manager who is able to contain the group by supporting the counsellors. It is possible that if the CCO appointed a manager who could serve this function, the counsellors would be more active in their counselling roles.

- **Resources** – The appointment of a manager could assist with the issue of resources, as this person could take responsibility for ensuring that the counsellors have the necessary resources to continue with their work.

- **Training** – While the counsellors were quite emphatic about the fact that they benefited from the basic counselling skills training that they received, some

participants highlighted the need for ongoing training. Further training could continue to empower the counsellors as they engage with new issues and ensure that they are constantly equipped to engage in the counselling process. This training could include issues relating to psychological empowerment. For example, if the counsellors received more input on skills required to the running of an organisation, they may have felt more empowered and thus, better enabled to continue with their work.

*Recommendations for future research/empowerment initiatives*

It has been stated that this study may not be applicable to other groups. Despite this, consideration of certain issues that were raised by the study could assist researchers or implementers of empowerment initiatives. These are as follows:

- **Needs of target group** – The literature has highlighted the need for empowerment initiatives to match the requirements of the target group. The CCO counsellors reported changes in their lives that indicated that involvement in the CCO was an empowering process for them. It is likely that they experienced their involvement as empowering due to the fact that it met their empowerment requirements. It is critical that implementers of empowerment initiatives take into account the needs of their target group.

- **Issues surrounding empowerment initiatives** – Although the counsellors experienced feeling empowered, there were other issues that impacted on their ability to deliver counselling services. Empowerment initiatives should take cognisance of all issues that could prevent individuals from successfully implementing and applying their skills.

- **Further research into successful counselling services –** The need for counselling services in South Africa is great. Many services are already in existence, offering counselling through the use of volunteer counsellors. Research

that focuses on successful counselling groups could assist organisations such as the CCO, that have counsellors who are ready to offer services, but require practical and administrative assistance.

## Conclusion

Empowerment as a means to assist disadvantaged communities to break out of the cycle of poverty has been given little attention in the South African context. The CCO is an organisation that offers counselling services within a disadvantaged community. Prior to offering these services, the CCO counsellors underwent a process of empowerment. A psychologist was responsible for training the counsellors in basic counselling skills. In addition, the training involved developing self-awareness in the counsellors which assisted them in dealing with their own life issues. This study was undertaken to explore the perceptions of counsellors regarding their psychological empowerment following their involvement in the CCO. In addition, the study explored whether there are restraints linked to psychological empowerment in the rendering of counselling services. Five out of seven CCO counsellors consented to be interviewed for this study.

Empowerment theory postulates that psychological empowerment takes place on three levels. Firstly individuals undergo a change in their beliefs about themselves, particularly related to their beliefs in their ability to influence outcomes. In addition, individuals develop skills and a critical awareness regarding their environment. As a result of their change in beliefs, the skills learned and the development of a critical awareness, individuals are able to take action to influence outcomes. In the interviews, all of the participants related ways in which they experienced changes in their lives on all three of the levels discussed above.

Three of the five participants reported a positive change in the beliefs that they hold about themselves. The fourth counsellor reported that prior to involvement in the CCO,

she experienced bouts of depression. Following her involvement with the CCO, she reported that she no longer experienced this depression.

The counsellors all reported that they developed a comprehensive set of counselling skills as a result of the CCO training. In addition, they were able to transfer these skills to other areas of their lives, including work and family relationships. The counsellors also reported that they developed a critical awareness relating to the community they serve as well as to their own lives. The findings of the study did, however, suggest that the critical awareness developed might not have included an awareness of the structural inequities that are responsible for perpetuating the lack of empowerment of the community. The researcher also considered other hypotheses which might explain the apparent lack of awareness of the impact of social inequities. It is also possible that the participants simply did not mention this issue because the researcher did not probe for their opinions on this issue.

As a result of their changed beliefs, skills learned and the development of a critical awareness, all the counsellors reported being able to take action in their counselling work as well as in other areas in their lives. This action resulted in positive outcomes for the counsellors. They reported feeling effective as counsellors. In addition, there was a positive impact on their careers. One of the counsellors embarked on a course of study to qualify as an educational psychologist. Another counsellor was able to start her own business, following a period of unemployment. The other three counsellors reported being able to use their counselling skills to influence work relationships positively. Another sphere where the counsellors appeared to experience a profound change was in their relationships with close family members. It seemed that the counsellors were able to act differently within these relationships, leading to positive outcomes.

While there were some similarities in the reports given by the counsellors about how the empowerment through CCO involvement manifested in their lives, there was a difference in how the participants described the impact. Three of the participants described feeling that CCO involvement had a profound impact on their lives. Although the other two

described areas where they experienced being empowered, the impact was not as profound as for the other three. It appeared that these two participants did not have as many personal difficulties as the first three and therefore, it could be that their empowerment requirements were different. This is in keeping with empowerment theory which highlights that empowerment has different meanings for different people.

One criticism of empowerment relates to the fact that it may not always be in people's best interests to be empowered. Many communities rely on a sense of connectedness and group interests take precedence over the rights of the individual. Empowerment often leads to individuals asserting their own needs, which could lead to their disconnection from the community. An important finding of the study was that the empowerment of the counsellors did not lead to their alienation from their community. In fact, the counsellors experienced an improvement in their relationships with others, leading to a greater sense of connectedness with their communities.

The counsellors all commented extensively on their experiences of working for the CCO as an organisation. While they experienced many benefits as a result of their involvement, there were also frustrations in conducting their work. Many of these frustrations appeared to be linked to the issue of resources. As the counsellors are all involved in full-time work or study, they all experienced the problem of limited time to engage in CCO work. In addition, the group struggled with not having administrative support and resources such as proper premises to conduct counselling from. These frustrations led to some counsellors resigning, which was disappointing for the other counsellors who relied on their colleagues for support. The counsellors who left the CCO have all continued with community work and counselling. Thus, although the CCO could no longer benefit from the service of these individuals, the community at large has benefited from the skills training provided by the CCO.

The difficulties experienced by the CCO in terms of its administration are similar to those experienced by other community organisations. Many counselling organisations experience difficulty in attending to the administrative aspects of the service.

Counsellors, who may not have the necessary skills, are often responsible for these duties. The frustration experienced by the counsellors in carrying out these duties can prevent them from focusing on the actual counselling work. In addition, most of the participants appeared to have an external locus of control in relation to their beliefs about their ability to influence the future of the CCO. They appeared stuck and unable to take action that would lead to the progression of the CCO. This seemed to indicate an issue linked to psychological empowerment. Thus, although the counsellors experienced feeling empowered, which had a significant impact on most of their lives, they did appear to be lacking in certain critical aspects of empowerment.

The study also explored the issue of empowerment and the practice of community psychology in the current South African context. The literature has dealt extensively with the difficulties encountered by psychologists working in community settings. The type of problems encountered relate to lack of funding, poor resources and lack of understanding in the community of the benefits of counselling. In addition community psychology is characterised by chaos and a lack of theoretical underpinning. Considering that professionals, who have extensive training, struggle to overcome these difficulties, it is not surprising that the participants in the study struggled to deal with these issues.

However, it is also important to note that the appointment of a manager, who could take responsibility for resolving the issues that hindered the counsellors, would enable the counsellors to focus on the actual counselling work. In this situation, they might be sufficiently psychologically empowered to deliver counselling services to their clients. The fact that some of the counsellors proceeded to work successfully in other organisations, suggests that they were significantly empowered, and with the correct support, were able to deliver services within the community.

Thus, the study has answered the research questions. A discussion of the perceptions of the counsellors with regards to their psychological empowerment has been undertaken. In addition, the study has explored the issues that are restraints in the rendering of counselling services. It appears that these restraints may be linked to psychological

empowerment. The study has also noted that, despite these restraints, the CCO could be more successful if effective leadership that could take responsibility for decision-making and directing of the organisation, was provided.

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## *Appendices*

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

**Date**

My name is Cathy Mollink, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is that of lay counselling interventions and how they can impact on the empowerment of a community. To explore this topic, I am hoping to conduct interviews with people who have been involved in the counselling part of the Community Counselling Organisation (CCO). I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Participation in this research will entail being interviewed by myself. The interview will take place at a time and place that is convenient for you and will last for approximately one hour. With your permission, this interview will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy.

Participation is voluntary, and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. All of your responses from the interviews will be kept confidential, and no information that could identify you would be included in the research report. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation at any time, and will only be processed by myself and/or my supervisor. You may refuse to answer any questions you would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point.

I will contact you within two weeks to discuss your participation and if you choose to participate in the study, we can then make the necessary arrangements or alternatively you can inform me of your

decision not to participate. Should you wish to discuss any aspect of this study, I can be contacted telephonically at **083 679 7147** or via e-mail at **cathym@eject.co.za.**

Although there is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study, your participation would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute both to a larger body of knowledge on empowerment of communities, as well as to your community's special project that has been implemented. This can help the CCO programme to improve the counselling service that they offer.

Kind Regards

Cathy Mollink

Appendix B: Consent Form

I _____ consent to being interviewed by Cathy Mollink for her study on empowerment of communities through lay counselling interventions.

I understand that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- I will not receive any benefits from participating in this interview.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.

Signed _____

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

1. Can you please describe your experiences in working with the CCO?

2. How did the training you received as a CCO counsellor add to knowledge/skills you already had?

3. Has working for the CCO in any way affected the beliefs you have about yourself for example, how effective do believe you are as a counsellor?

4. How motivated do you feel about your work for the CCO?

5. How effective do you see yourself in being able to influence the progression of the CCO as a counselling service?

6. How have you solved problems that you have encountered in your work for the CCO?

7. How has the way you have personally worked and operated within the CCO affected the progression of this service?

8. How has the way the CCO operates affected your development as a counsellor and how effective you feel in your role?

9. What factors do you think have led to your growth (or lack of growth) as a counsellor within the CCO?

Appendix D: Summary of main themes and sub-themes

| Theme | Title of theme | Sub-themes |
|---|---|---|
| Theme one: | Counsellors' beliefs about themselves | ➢ Previous traumas or life challenges that influenced beliefs about self<br>➢ Perceptions regarding own self-worth and importance of self-care<br>➢ Belief in ability to cope with life challenges<br>➢ Beliefs about self in relation to others |
| Theme two: | PE at the interactional level | ➢ Counselling skills development<br>➢ Life skills development<br>➢ Development of critical awareness relating to community<br>➢ Development of critical awareness relating to counsellor's personal lives |
| Theme three: | Behavioural changes in the participants | ➢ Changes in counselling behaviour<br>➢ Action within the employment sphere<br>➢ Changes in behaviour in close personal relationships<br>➢ Community participation and action<br>➢ Responses of others in the participants' context |
| Theme four: | Participants' perceptions of the CCO as an organisation | ➢ Counsellors' positive experiences while working for the CCO<br>➢ Role of the professional within the CCO<br>➢ Negative features of the CCO<br>➢ Counsellors' comments regarding the CCO's lack of progress |