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Perceptions of newly qualified social workers regarding supervision within the Department of Social Development in the Limpopo province, South Africa

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CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is a discussion of the research approach used in this study to understand the perceptions of supervision of newly qualified social workers in the Waterberg District of Limpopo Province. The chapter explains the choice of a qualitative method, and the data collection and analysis procedures used in the study. A single case study design was chosen to explore the views of newly qualified social workers. Furthermore, this chapter containsa discussion of how the researcher ensured the trustworthiness of the study. Finally, the ethical considerations and procedures followed when conducting the study are discussed.

3.2 Research Approach

A qualitative approach was adopted for the study. This was an appropriate approach for the study as the researcher wanted to explore the rich meaning that newly qualified social workers give to the process of supervision within the DSD. Qualitative researchers are "interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experience they have in the world" (Merriam, 2009, p.13). Creswell (2009) contends that the qualitative approach is a means of exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. In the entire qualitative research process, the researcher keeps focusing on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that researchers or writers from the literature bring to the topic or problem (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative researchers tend to collect data at the site where participants experience the issue or the problem of the study (Creswell, 2009). This assists the researcher to gain an

understanding of the experiences of the participants. In this way, qualitative research allows the researcher to gaininsight into a phenomenon.

3.3 Research Design

This researchmade use of the single case study design. Single case study design involves the study of a unit (Drummond, 1996), whichin thiscase isthe newly qualified social workers' perceptions of supervision within their organisation (McNabb, 2010). In addition, single case study design requires careful investigation of the potential case (Yin, 2009, p.50). The single case study design is appropriate as it enables the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions of newly qualified social workers on supervision in the workplace (Bryman, 2012). The limitation of this research design is that the data cannot be contexualise to other situations because the information is closely tied to the situation studied (Griffin & Moorhead, 2010, p. 529).

3.4 Population of the study

The population is the "individuals, groups, organisations, human products and events, or conditions that the researcher is interested in studying" (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005, p.52). On the other hand, population is referred to as an abstract idea of a large population of many cases from which a researcher draws the sample (Neuman, 2011, p.241). For the purpose of this study, the population refers to all registered newly qualified social workers employed at the Department of Social Development in the Waterberg District of the Limpopo Province. The eligibility criteria in the study were that the participants should have been working as social workers for less than three years.

3.5 Sample and sampling procedure

The research sample comprises elements of the population considered for the actual inclusion in the study (Chambliss & Schutt, 2012; Strydom, 2011). A total sample of 20 participants was selected from the DSD Mogalakwena and Lephalale Municipalities in the Waterberg District. In addition, three key informants were social work supervisors from Mogalakwena and Lephalale Municipalities, with five years and more work experience,who have supervised other social workers for at least two years. Key informants are the individuals who as the results of their positions in the community know more about the subject study (Royse, 2011). Key informants contributed their perseptive on the process of supervision within DSD.

In this study, non-probability purposive sampling was an appropriate sampling method. In purposive sampling, "researchers rely on their experience, ingenuity, and/or previous research findings to deliberately obtain units of analysis in such a manner that the sample they obtain may be regarded as being representative of the relevant population" (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005, p.69). This type of sampling suggests that the researcher's knowledge of the population is important in selecting the sample for a particular study. Purposive sampling works where the researcher already knows something about the specific people or event and deliberately selects particular ones because they are likely to produce the most valuable data (Denscombe, 2002, p.35).

Selecting the sample instead of working with the whole population save the researchers' time during data collection and analysis.In selecting the sample, the researcher used her judgement in relation to the eligibility criteria (Kurmar, 2014). However, the limitation to purposive sampling is that the researcher plays an activite role in deciding who should be in the sample and bias can be easily introduced (Kanjee, 1999).

In drawing up the sample for the study, the researcher targeted the participants from various DSD offices in the Waterberg District of the Limpopo Province. The researcher negotiated

entry with the social work supervisors within the respective municipalities. The researcher explained the purpose of conducting this research to the supervisors and requested to have a meeting with social workers. The meetings were held at the respective offices of the social workers and the participants' information sheets were distributed and explained. The researcher was then offered an office wherein the participants with interest to participate in the study were interviewed. The question concerning years of experience was asked during recruitment to ensure that the participants met the criteria. The interviews with the participants took about fifteen to thirty minutes.

3.6 Data collection instruments

The researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule as a research instrument to explore the topic more openly and to allow the interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words (Esterberg, 2002, p.87). It assisted the researcher to have more latitude to probe beyond the answer, and thus enter into a dialogue with the participants (May, 2011, p. 134). Furthermore, having an instrument assists the researcher with the specific questions to be asked to the participants (Bailey, 2007). However this method has the limitation that the interviewee may be unwilling or uncomfortable to share all that the interviewer hopes to explore (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In dealing with this limitation, the researcher firstly pre-tested the both research instrument at Thabaleshoba Social Development offices to determine if the questions were understandable to participants. There were two semi-structured interview schedules, one for the participants and the other for key informants.

3.6.1 Pre-testing

Pre-testing is "a screening procedure that involves a trial run with a group of respondents to iron out fundamental problems in the survey design" (Zikmund & Babin, 2006, p. 183).The purpose of pre-testing the interview schedules was to determine whether the questions would be understandable to the participants. For the purpose of this study, the researcher interviewed two newly qualified social workers and one supervisor at the Thabaleshoba DSD

offices, Mogalakwena Municipality. The participants chosen for pre-testing did not form part of the sample for the study. The questions were understandable to participants during the pilot, but some amendments were made on semi-structured interview schedules by including another question.

3.7 Data collection methods

The researcher used semi-structured, in-depth, face to face interviews as a method of data collection. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to gain insight into the views of the participants and to be flexible with participants' responses. In-depth, face to face interviews assisted the researcher to gain understanding of the participants' knowledge and experiences (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; Seidman, 2013). A semi-structured interview means that each participant is asked the same set of pre-established questions, in the same order, by the researcher (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996).

Like other data collection methods, the semi-structured face to face interview has some strength and weaknesses. The strengths are that it allows the researcher to probe and explore as the study is conducted andthe participants' own words are captured (Holloway, 2005b). King and Horrocks (2010) contend that interviewing in qualitative studies tends to focus on participants' actual experiences more than general beliefs and opinions, but this is dependent on the questions asked. Another advantage is that the interviewer can easily engage with the interviewee and clarify some of the questions that are not clear. Also, during an interview, non-verbal cues can be noted and recorded (Holloway, 2005b). However, the method has weaknesses, in that it requires the researcher to establish rapport with the participants in order to gain more information (Morse as cited in Greef, 2011). Interviewing is also time consuming, particularly transcription and analysis of data (Holloway, 2005b).

The data was collected at various DSD offices. The researcher recorded the interviews with the participants' consent. The participants were free to use their language of preference,the most used language being Sepedi although some used English. After permission was granted, the interviews were recorded using audio tape and then verbatim transcripts weremade. The researcher used a reflective diary to record her thoughts, feelings and reflections after each interview.

3.8 Data analysis

In this study, thematic content analysis wasemployed and the researcherfollowed the steps of data analysis outlined by Creswell (2009, p.185) as a guideline. Firstly, the researcher recorded the data with the consent obtained from the participants. The researcher then transcribed the interviews verbatim for the purpose of analysis. Furthermore, all data was read to gain a general sense of the information and its meaningandsignificant words and phrases were highlighted. The researcher thereafter began with the coding process.

Coding is the process of organising material into segment of text before bringing meaning into information (Rossman & Ralis, as cited in Creswell, 2009, p.186). Themes were then generated and the data was presented in verbatim quotesrepresenting different themes. The advantage of using thematic content analysis is that it assisted the researcher to identify different topics or themes and to code the verbal and non-verbal data by means of analysing each interview transcript (Schurink, Fouche & De Vos, 2011). On the other hand, thematic content analysis involves reading and re-reading the data and identifies emergent themes and patterns, and uses themes for organising data (Wells, 2007). However, this type of analysis

requires the researcher to be attentive to words and phrases in the participants' vocabularies (Schurink, Fouche & De Vos, 2011).

3.9 Trustworthiness of the study

Several measures have been taken to ensure trustworthiness in the study. The concept of trustworthiness evaluates the quality of qualitative research on the basis of four concepts which are credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Creswell, 2007).

3.9.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the inquiry has been conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject has been accurately identified and described (Schurink, Fouche& De Vos, 2011). Furthermore, Denscombe (2002, p. 299) contends that credibility is the extent to which qualitative researcherscan demonstrate that their data are accurate and appropriate. The researcher ensured credibility by asking questions carefully and using interviewing skills such as probing, clarification and summarising to ensure that information is correctly captured. The researcher taped the interviews and developed verbatim transcripts of the interviews. The reliability of transcription was checked by reading through them while listening to the recordings. In addition, the key informants'datawere used to triangulate the data obtained from the participants.

3.9.2 Dependability

Dependability refers to the extent to which the researcher employs techniques to show that if the work were repeated in the same context, with the same methods and the same participants, similar results would be obtained (Shenton, 2004, p. 67). Although meeting the dependability in qualitative research may be difficult, the researcher has explained the

research methodology for the study. This will enable other researchers to follow the process and the procedures used by the researcher in future.

3.9.3 Transferability

Transferability is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other similar contexts(Shenton, 2004, p.69). This study mainly focused on perceptions of newly qualified social workers regarding supervision in the DSD, Limpopo Province. Since the context has been described in some detail, it should be possible for the reader to recognise similarities in another context and to transfer results with caution.

3.9.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to a state in which the findings of the study could be confirmed by others (Lincoln & Guba as cited in Schurink, Fouche& De Vos, 2011). It is "the extent to which qualitative research can produce findings that are free from the influence of the researcher who conducted the inquiry" (Denscombe, 2002, p.301). The confirmability of the study was ensured through recording the data. The data, including audio tapes, are safely kept in a lockable steel cabinet for reasons of confidentiality.

3.10 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the process whereby a researcher reflect on how his/her actions, values and perceptions impact upon the research setting, data collection and analysis (Lambert, Jomeen & McSherry, 2010, p. 322). There were challenges that the researcher encountered during the research process. During the data collection, the inital plan by the researcher was to interview the participants during the weekend, however, it was a challenges as many of the participants are staying outside the Waterberg District of the Limpopo Province.The researcher travelled long distance in order to interview the participants. Sometimes the researcher will make an appointment with some participants, but due to their work commitment, appointments were

postponed. This experience discouraged the researcher, however, the researcher was keen with her research study and adhered to ethics of the study throughout the completion data collection process. In future the researcher is intending to use questionnaires at data collection method because it saves time and and can easily be administered (Delport & Roestenberg, 2011).

3.11. Ethical considerations

Marshall and Rossman (2006) contend that ethical considerations areinformed consent and protecting participants' anonymity as well as situation specific considerations.The ethical issues which were considered relevant for the study will be discussed next.

3.11.1 Privacy and confidentiality

It is important to recognise and respect the privacy of the participants (David & Sutton, 2004). The participants were assured that the information provided during the study will be treated as confidential.The participants wereassured that their identifying particulars will be kept confidential. The participants' names used in this study are not their real names. It was agreed that the identity of the participants will be withheld so that their rights to privacy as stated in the South African Constitution Act 108 of 1996, Chapter 2 (Bill of Rights), section 14 (right to privacy) will not be violated. In addition, withholding of identities minimisesworkplace victimisation (Aquino, 2000). The researcher ensured that the data collected is kept safe, in a lockable steel cabinet. Anonymity was not guaranteed in the study due to the fact that face to face, semi structured interviews were conducted (Royse, 2011). However, the participants were assured that their identity will be protected.

3.11.2 Voluntary participation

The participants in this study wereinformed that their participation was voluntary (Babbie, 2013). As such, the researcher did not force anyone to participate in the study. The researcher informed the participants that they may withdraw from the study at any time if they wish to do so, with no negative repercussions, and that the data collected will be destroyed after the study is completed.

3.11.3 Informed consent

The researcher was employed by the DSD in Limpopo Province; consent to conduct the study was given by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Development in Limpopo Province. Informed consent means that the research subjects have the right to know that their perceptions are being researched, the right to be informed about the nature of the research and the right to withdraw at any time (Ryen, 2004). The researcher ensured that the participants consented to participate in the study by completing and signing a written consent form together with their consent being audio-taped.

3.11.4 No harm to participants

During the study, the researcher was very sensitive to causing harm when asking questions. The researcher believed that the study might risk causing psychological stress because participants might reveal experiences of psychological distress. In that instance, arrangements weremade with the psychologist at George Masibe Hospital for services to be provided to those who need counselling, at no cost.

3.12 Limitations of the study

The single case study design aims to reveal the richness of a particular situation but can be argued to have limitations as the findings cannot be generalised. According to Griffin and Moorhead (2010, p. 529) “the data cannot be generalised to other situations because the information is closely tied to the situation studied”. Furthermore, on account of the sensitive nature of the study, the participants may have given socially desirable answers to protect themselves, thinking that they may be in trouble with the employer. However, the researcher has assured them that their identities, participation will be keptconfidentialand the information sharedwill be kept anonymous. Even though the DSD granted the researcher permission to conduct the study, it was difficult to reach some of the participants as they are sometimes away from the office in order to conduct other work-related activities like attending courts, meetings and the workshops. The limited time given to researcher to interview the participants was also not enough to develop sufficient rapport to get rich information from them.

The majority of participants were requested to be interviewed in Sepedi, which required the research instrument to be changed during the interview. Some of English terminology used on the research instrument was difficult to be translated to Sepedi which forces the researcher to present them in English. This might have limited the participants responses due to their limited understanding on the terms.

3.13. Chapter summary

The chapter provided a discussion on the research approach and design, research population, sample and sampling procedures, data collection and analysis. Also, ethical consideration

followed during the course of the study and the limitation of the study. In the next Chapter, data will be presented, interpreted and analysed.