

CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The qualitative research design was used in the study. In-depth individual interviews were conducted with loveLife counselors to understand the impact of HIV and AIDS on adolescent sexual conduct (Struwig & Stead, 2001). The method was based on the phenomenological methodology, as the researcher wished to describe the perceptions that the counselors attached to the impact of adolescents' perceptions of sexual conduct (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2002). Purposive non-probability sampling was made use of. Semi-structured, one-to-one interviews were conducted, and data analyzed using the thematic content analysis.

The study was conducted at loveLife, with the counselors. LoveLife is an HIV and AIDS youth education organization. It was launched in September, 1999. The target group of the organization is adolescents aged between 12 and 17 years. Its main aim was to cut down the HIV and AIDS infection rate, amongst their target group, by 50 %. LoveLife was brought into existence not only to help reduce the high infection rate of HIV and AIDS amongst adolescent, but also to aid adolescents in other factors that affect their well being like problems with their parents (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2001). In this study, loveLife counselors were interviewed as they worked with adolescents on a daily basis and were well informed on how adolescents perceived issues.

LoveLife management was approached and their consent sought to interview some of their counselors. Management was asked to invite all the counselors who have worked at loveLife for two or more years. From the population of counselors who were keen to take part in this study, six were selected. Even though six counselors were originally selected, only five could be interviewed

as the sixth counselor fell ill during the study. The counselors' consent was sought to interview them and also to have the interviews tape-recorded. One counsellor was interviewed each day for about 30 minutes to 1 hour. Semi-structured one-to-one interviews were conducted with the counselors. Data was analyzed by means of thematic content analysis.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative design using semi-structured one-to-one interviews was utilized for data collection. The author sought in-depth understanding of the perceptions of loveLife counselors to the impact of HIV and AIDS on adolescent sexual conduct (Struwig & Stead, 2001).

3.3 SAMPLING METHODS

The sample was selected from loveLife counselors. The loveLife counselors are those people working with adolescents, to influence them, positively, in one way or another, especially regarding HIV and AIDS as well as those issues that seem to be important to adolescents. The sample had been working at loveLife, with adolescents, for two to five years. The researcher wished to interview six loveLife counselors, but only five interviews were carried out. The reason for not interviewing the sixth counselor was because she fell ill and could not continue with the interview. The data collected from the five loveLife counselors was, nonetheless adequate enough to have meaningful results.

Non-probability purposive sampling was used as information-rich participants were sought. The participants had the characteristics and knowledge needed by the researcher (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; De Vos et al., 2002; Sarantakos; 1998; Struwig & Stead, 2001). The participants would be able to provide the

researcher with the information that she needed regarding adolescents and their sexual behavior.

3.4 INSTRUMENTS USED

Semi-structured interviews which are interviews that allow the researcher to have flexibility in the way she asked questions were utilized in interviewing the loveLife counselors (Struwig & Stead, 2001). The researcher wished to accurately capture the data and as a result all the interviews were tape-recorded. After the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, the data was destroyed for confidentiality purposes.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

LoveLife management was asked to identify all the counselors that had worked at loveLife for two or more years. The researcher then briefed the counselors about the study and gave them the Information Sheet (see Appendix 1), and informed them that participation was voluntary. The counselors were given a choice if they wanted to be part of the study or not. From the response that the researcher received, all the counselors, who were present, wanted to be part of the study. The researcher chose six counselors, randomly, to be interviewed. The counselors filled in the biographical information questionnaire (see Appendix 2) which the researcher provided them with. The questionnaire was a means through which the counselors identified themselves to the author.

The counselors were requested to sign the consent form stating that they understood what the study was about and understood that participation was voluntary (see Appendix 3). The tape-recording consent form was then presented to them, which asked for their permission for the interviews to be

tape-recorded (see Appendix 4). The author wished to be transparent in her work, and as a result, the loveLife counselors were given the interview guideline (see Appendix 5). The interview guideline was firstly to help them better prepare for the interviews. Secondly, the interview guideline aided in providing information-rich answers, as the counselors had time to prepare for the interviews.

The counselors were interviewed individually in a private and quiet room, at the loveLife premises. Semi-structured, one-to-one interviews were used as in-depth information of the counselors' understanding was needed, and also to allow the researcher some degree of flexibility (De Vos et al., 2002). Participants were interviewed in one week, with one counselor being interviewed each day. The tape recorder was used during each interview. Making use of a tape recorder allowed the researcher to record fully and accurately what was being said rather than taking notes during the interviews. According to De Vos et al. (2002), it was very useful to make use of a tape recorder because the researcher is able to concentrate on what was said in the interviews so that s/he could think about a follow-up question.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The thematic content analysis was used to analyze the interview data. This analysis method comprised of five steps, namely: transcription, checking and editing, analysis and interpretation, and verification (Karlsson, undated; Sarantakos, 1998).

Step 1: Transcription

- The researcher transferred tape recorded data onto paper, and read it to get an idea of what the data was about.

Step 2: Checking and Editing

- The data was divided into smaller related (meaningful) units. This was achieved by reading each paragraph and recording the themes that were in every paragraph. Similar themes were then grouped together to make related units.

Step 3: Analysis and Interpretation

- Psychological meaning was used to interpret the themes, from step 2. This was achieved by using the author's understanding of the themes that were presented. The psychological interpretation was then used as the facts.

Step 4: Generalization

- The differences and similarities, between the different interviews were identified, allowing typologies to develop.
- The author summarized the units in the order that suited her, by dividing them into related paragraphs. The differences were also grouped into individual paragraphs.

Step 5: Validation

- Validity of the data was checked by going through the transcripts again, and allowing my colleague to read it as well- so as to validate the findings.
- The central theme was then obtained (Karlsson, undated; Krippendorff, 1980; Sarantakos, 1998).

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research honoured the ethical standards set by the generic research ethics. In so doing, the participants were informed about all the steps that were to be taken in this research. The participants were more important than the study, and therefore always respected. The participants were informed that the study was completely voluntary, and would not affect their jobs, in any way. Confidentiality was provided, as the subjects' identifying information was not sought. The data collection material was destroyed on completion of the study.

3.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The data collected from the five loveLife counselors was adequate enough to carry on with this study. The first limitation and source of error was giving the counselors the interview guideline before the interviews. Even though providing the loveLife counselors with the interview guideline prior to the interviews was viewed as a good gesture, it may have also limited and caused errors in the study. This may be so because in giving the counselors time to think about what to say or how to answer the questions, they could have prepared answers that they thought the researcher wanted to hear. The counselors could have also prepared answers that warranted loveLife credit for the good work they had been doing with adolescents regarding HIV and AIDS. It may also be that the answers given were answers agreed upon by the counselors who were interviewed. The counselors could have discussed the questions and answers together prior to the interviews.

The second limitation of the study is that the study cannot be generalized nationally due to the small sample that was used. The sample consisted of only five loveLife counselors, and all the counselors reside in Johannesburg.

As a result, their perceptions will only be based on what they think is happening in Gauteng.

The third limitation and source of error could be that the loveLife counselors seem to be working with adolescents who are only in urban areas, and their perceptions are shaped from the interaction they have with only urban dwellers. This does not cover the perceptions of other youths in other areas.

The fourth and last limitation is based on the fact that the counselors could have been biased in the answers they gave. They could have been biased in that they were trying to make loveLife look good, rather than reporting on what the situation was really like.