

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the preceding chapter, this study dealt with the theoretical foundation of the research subject. The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the research methodology utilized in this study.

Qualitative methodology was chosen in order to explore and describe the views of social workers with regard to the need for, and contents of a marriage enrichment programme for married couples. An exploratory-descriptive research design was chosen to conduct this research study. An overview of the research process will be provided. This chapter will also focus on the in-depth process of data collection and data analysis to be utilized in this study.

#### **3.2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The aim of the study is to identify and describe the content of a marriage enrichment programme.

The objectives of the study are:

- To explore the need for a marriage enrichment programme by means of perusal of available literature and an empirical study.
- To explore the elements that will comprise the content of an enrichment programme by means of qualitative research using different focus groups.
- To provide themes for the development of an enrichment programme.
- To formulate guidelines, conclusions and recommendations based on the results of the study.

### **3.3 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

The following steps as set out by Neuman (2000:12), was followed to conduct the study.

#### **STEP 1: Choose The Topic**

Select as the topic the social workers' views regarding the need for a marriage enrichment programme and identify the contents of a marriage enrichment programme.

#### **STEP 2: Focus The Research Question**

Narrow down the research topic by means of specific research questions and develop related research questions. Clarify the central goal and associated aims of this study. Link these to the problem formulation of the topic.

#### **STEP 3: Design The Study**

Select a research design (exploratory-descriptive research design). Select a method, select a purposive sampling procedure and develop and refine a data collection tool.

#### **STEP 4: Collect Data**

Conduct the focus groups. Administer the interview schedule and facilitate the group discussions surrounding the selected topic. Focus group sessions will be audiotaped. Field notes will also be taken during the sessions.

**STEP 5: Analyse Data**

Select a method of data analysis. Develop an analysis protocol. Address methodological considerations, including reliability and validity. Analyse data and organize them into themes. Select Guba's (1985) Model of Trustworthiness, as a method of data verification.

**STEP 6: Interpret Data**

Interpret data by means of an inductive analysis process. Conduct a literature control. Consider the study findings in relation to Guba's (1985) model to assess the trustworthiness of the study findings.

**STEP 7: Inform Others**

Write the research report, including conclusions, recommendations and an evaluation of the study.

**3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

According to Mouton (2001:55) a research design is a plan or blueprint of how one intends conducting the research. According to De Vos (2002:137) and Huysamen (1993:10) a closely related definition of design is "the plan or blueprint according to which data are collected to investigate the research hypothesis or question in the most economical manner". Due to the nature of this study, a qualitative approach was selected, and an exploratory-descriptive research design utilized.

The qualitative research paradigm refers to research that elicits participant accounts of meaning, experience or perceptions. It also produces descriptive data in the participant's own spoken words (De Vos, 2002).

An exploratory research design is recommended when the researcher wants to build a foundation of general ideas that can be thoroughly explored at a later time. The answer to a "what" question would, according to Mouton (2001), constitute an

exploratory study. This study is also descriptive in nature because it seeks to describe the contents of a marriage enrichment programme.

### **3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

According to De Vos (2002:198) Kerlinger (1986) defines sampling as taking any portion of a population or universe as representative of that population or universe. The sample taken is considered to be representative. A population is defined as the total set from which the individuals or units of the study are chosen (De Vos, 2002: 198).

De Vos (2002:199) states that the major reason for sampling is feasibility. A complete coverage of the total population is seldom possible, such as the population of social workers in Johannesburg cannot possibly be reached. Sampling is thus done to increase the feasibility, cost-effectiveness, accuracy and manageability of the study.

The purposive sampling method was used to select participants for the purpose of this study. According to De Vos (2002:207) this type of sampling is based entirely on the judgement of the researcher, in that a sample is composed of elements that contain the most characteristic, representative or typical attributes of the population.

The sample of participants were selected from two organizations, the Department of Social Development (6 social workers) and the South African Police Service (6 social workers) that employ social workers, and who work with married couples. The sample comprised of a total of 12 social workers that are working in the Johannesburg area. The sample of social workers that were chosen had a wide spectrum of experience in the field of working with couples and families. The years of experience and cultural backgrounds of the sample will be further discussed in chapter four.

### **3.6 DATA COLLECTION**

According to De Vos (2002:291) the purpose of the research must guide the researcher to choose the most effective method of information collection. This study utilized focus groups as an interviewing method for data collection.

Focus groups are group interviews (De Vos, 2002:305). They are a means of better understanding how people feel or think about an issue, product or service. In this research, the participants' thoughts and feelings regarding the practice of marriage enrichment was sought. Participants were selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the focus group, in this instance, the participants were all practicing social workers involved in marital counseling.

The researcher created a tolerant environment in the focus group that encouraged participants to share perceptions, points of view, experiences, wishes and concerns, without pressurizing participants to vote or reach consensus. A facilitator guides the interview, while a small group discusses the topics that the facilitator raises. The researcher facilitated the focus group discussions in this study. What the participants in the focus group say during the discussions constitutes the essential data in focus groups (De Vos, 2002:306). The data for this study was thus obtained from the discussions of the social workers interviewed through the focus groups.

According to De Vos (2002:306), Krueger (quoted in Kingry et al., 1990:124) defines the focus group as a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. Morgan (1997:6) describes focus groups as a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher.

In this study, focus groups were used as a self-contained method in which they served as the principle source of data (De Vos, 2002:306). Focus groups allow the

researcher to investigate a multitude of perceptions in a defined area of interest, which, in this study, is the subject of marriage enrichment.

According to De Vos (2002:306), the purpose of focus groups is to promote self-disclosure among participants. It is to know what people really think and feel. Focus groups are useful when multiple viewpoints or responses are needed on a specific topic. This can be obtained in a shorter period of time than individual interviews. It is fundamentally a way of listening to people and learning from them, and of creating lines of communication. The actual groups are at the midpoint of a larger, three-part process of communication:

1. The researcher decides what he needs to hear from the participants.
2. The focus groups create a conversation among the participants around these topics.
3. The researcher summarises what s/he has learned from the participants.

Throughout this process, the researcher's essential motivation should be a desire to listen and learn from the participants. According to Greeff in De Vos (2002:307) focus groups draw on three of the fundamental strengths that are shared by all qualitative methods:

- Exploration and discovery
- Context and depth
- Interpretation

Focus groups were used in this study in order to explore and discover the social workers thoughts, feelings and perceptions regarding marriage enrichment programmes.

Focus groups create a process of sharing and comparing among the participants. The researcher creates focus groups for a well-defined purpose and they produce large amounts of concentrated data in a short period of time (De Vos, 2002:307).

### **3.6.1. Planning the focus groups**

Careful planning with respect to participants, the environment and questions to be asked are keys to conducting effective focus groups. According to De Vos (2002: 309), the basic decisions in the planning process are the following:

- Define the purpose and outcomes of the project.
- Obtain permission.
- Develop the timeline for the project.
- Determine who the participants will be.
- Write the questions in the question guide.
- Develop a recruitment plan.
- Set the locations, dates and times for the session.
- Design the analysis plan.

The steps mentioned above were carefully followed by the researcher during the planning of the research study. Permission was obtained verbally from the managers of the two organizations for the focus groups to be held. Two focus groups were held, one with social workers from the Dept of Social Development and the other with social workers at the South African Police Service.

### **3.6.2. Data Collection Tool**

The researcher used a focus group interview guide to guide the group discussion. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990:512) state that group discussions need to be guided and directed so that it remains focused on the topic of interest.

The groups were asked the following questions to guide the discussion around the topic:

1. What do you understand about the concept of marriage enrichment?
2. What do you think is the purpose of marriage enrichment?
3. How do you use marriage enrichment, or how would you use marriage enrichment in your practice?
4. How would you present a marriage enrichment programme?
5. What topics do you think should be covered in a marriage enrichment programme?
6. What topics do you think should not be covered in a marriage enrichment programme?

In order to make the participants feel comfortable and relaxed, the researcher conducted the focus groups in the participants' own office buildings. The participants were interviewed in their respective groups where they knew each other and were comfortable with each other. This resulted in a rich and enthusiastic discussion between participants who felt comfortable to express their viewpoints freely.

The data obtained from the focus groups was preserved by recording the focus group sessions with a tape recorder as well as by using an assistant to record field notes. The researcher also took careful note of the dynamics in the different groups, which will be utilized in the analysis phase of the study.



The researcher, in preparation for data analysis, then manually transcribed the focus group interviews.

### **3.7. DATA ANALYSIS**

Marshall and Rossman (1995:111) state that data analysis is a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. On the other hand, Stewart and Shamdansani (1990:102) state that the research question and purpose for which the data is collected determines the nature of data analysis. After data has been collected and formulated, there is a need to analyze it in order to arrive at findings and conclusions.

The analysis of data in this study will be conducted according to the format adopted by Pires (2003:17) in her research study.

## **FIGURE 3.1: OVERVIEW OF DATA MANAGEMENT AND DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS**

### **MACRO LEVEL**

Manage, organize, analyse and synthesize data across the three sources of information – textual, narrative, field notes and researcher reflections.

### **MICRO LEVEL**

#### **Stage 1: Data Reduction**

Reduce total mass of data via the use of a conceptual framework. Organise and code data. Identify themes in data and link to research questions.

**Step 1:** Transcribe recorded interviews verbatim and develop categories based on data.

**Step 2:** Scan and read data in relation to the predetermined categories.

**Step 3:** Collate and write up data obtained from focus groups under each of the identified categories.

**Step 4:** Summarise in written form, integrate data within each category using charts and diagrams.

**Step 5:** Code and analyse reduced data according to the analysis protocol.

**Step 6:** Identify themes and develop schedules.

#### **Stage 2: Data Display**

Display data in an organized and concise manner, such that conclusions can be drawn from the findings.

**Step 1:** Transfer analysed data into graphic form for the purpose of comparison and drawing of conclusions.

**Step 2:** Draw tentative conclusions.

#### **Stage 3: Conclusion Drawing and Verification**

Interpret data and draw meaning from it. Verify data in relation to validity and reliability.

**Step 1:** Interpret data in relation to the research questions.

**Step 2:** Assess validity and reliability, using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model of trustworthiness.

The researcher has adopted Marlow's (1993:154) two-phase approach to data analysis:

- ❑ Organizing data
- ❑ Constructing categories

### **3.7.1 ORGANIZING QUALITATIVE DATA**

Before data is analysed, it should be organized. Four elements have been considered to be crucial in organizing data for this study.

#### **3.7.1.1 FIELD NOTES**

Data has been collected by means of focus group interviews. The researcher also utilized a scribe (assistant facilitator) to make field notes. These notes were used to compare data during the process of analysis.

#### **3.7.1.2 THE USE OF AUDIOTAPE**

An audiotape was used to record focus group sessions. Permission was sought from the participants and it was granted. The audiotape was used to preserve data.

#### **3.7.1.3 TRANSCRIBING**

After every focus group session the researcher transcribed the participants' responses, writing the verbatim record from the audiotape. The transcripts were put in each group's file.

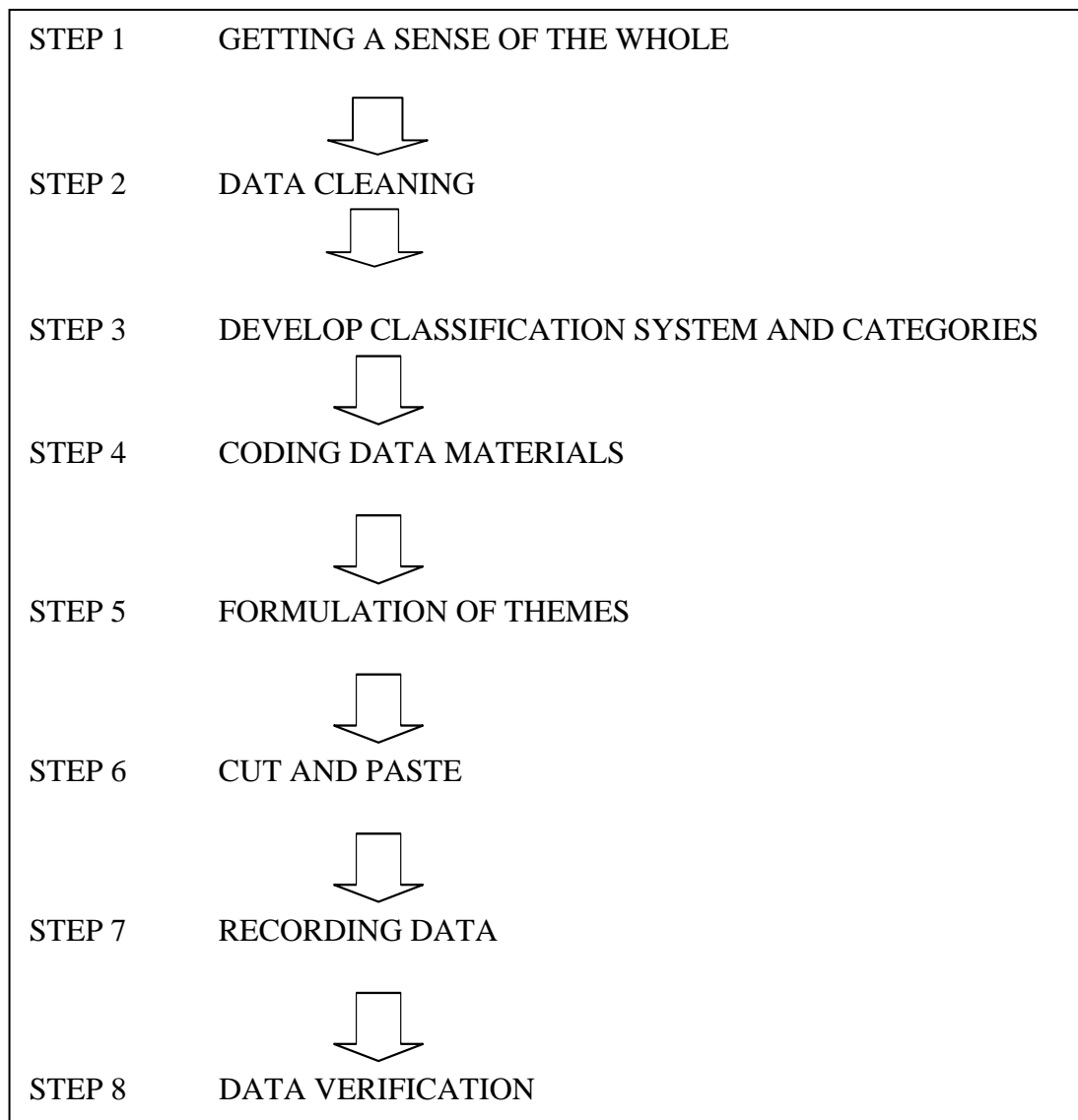
#### **3.7.1.4 ORGANIZING FILES**

The raw data was then organized into files. The researcher used files to organize the work and the information gathered from the group. There were files for each group. Files were also used during the cut-and-paste step of constructing categories, where information belonging to one category was put together in one file.

### 3.7.2 CONSTRUCTING CATEGORIES

At this stage there was raw data in mass in the form of transcripts and field notes. The researcher had to identify ways of converting data into specific units of information that could be analyzed.

Creswell's (1994:155) eight-step procedure of coding data was chosen as guide. These steps will be illustrated in Figure 3.2. below.



**Figure 3.2: Steps of data analysis**

These steps will be discussed further hereunder.

#### STEP 1: Getting a sense of the whole

The researcher read through all the transcripts carefully and wrote down some ideas about the data as they came to mind. This was done to get an overall view of the information provided by respondents pertaining to the research question(s).

#### STEP 2: Data cleaning

This first step was followed by taking the focus group transcripts one at a time and reading them through again, trying to get their underlying meaning.

It was important for the researcher to be clear about what is desired from the data material, and focus on identifying sections of transcript that are relevant to the research study. Stewart and Shamdansani (1990:104) state that the data material that should be taken into account is that which gives answers to research questions.

#### STEP 3: Developing classification system and categories

The researcher developed a classification system for data material. This was accomplished by making a list of topics from the data. These topics were classified into categories.

#### STEP 4: Coding data material

Coding is an operation by which data is organized into classes and divided into parts by way of a classification system. A number or symbol is given to each item according to the class into which it falls. The researcher went back to the data and identified material in the transcript that related to each topic or category.

Codes were developed for each and every topic in the categories by abbreviating each topic. This resulted in a brief, easily remembered word that was assigned to

each topic within the categories by writing the code in the left margin next to the appropriate topic. An analysis schedule was used to guide the process of content analysis in this study.

#### STEP 5: Formulation of themes

Themes were formulated from the topics within the developed categories. The researcher recognized patterns in the data. This was achieved by reading through the transcripts and field notes. She developed new concepts, formulated conceptual definitions and examined the relationship among concepts. She also linked concepts to each other in terms of a sequence. Marshall and Rossman (1991:441) state that a qualitative researcher analyzes data by organizing it into categories on the basis of themes, concepts, or similar features.

#### STEP 6: Cut-and-paste step

At this stage data material belonging to each category was assembled. Stewart and Shamdansani (1990:102) and Grinnell (1993:66) call this process the cut-and-paste technique. This is about cutting (and thus separating) each piece of the transcribed focus group interviews according to its code and sorting it with all material relevant to that particular category.

#### STEP 7: Recording data

This step is about recording the existing material. The researcher went back to each file and read the materials within it to verify that the data material was correctly placed. The data was then recorded on an analysis schedule.

## STEP 8: Data verification

Part of this phase is to evaluate the data for its informational credibility, usefulness and centrality (Marshall and Rossman, 1999:116). A literature control will be done to verify the trustworthiness of the data collected in this study. The literature control is presented in chapter 5.

### **3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

Marshall and Rossman (1995) and De Vos (2002:351) state that all research must respond to canons that stand as criteria against which the trustworthiness of the project can be evaluated. These canons can be phrased as questions to which all research must respond. Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed four constructs or criteria to test the soundness of the findings of the research project. These are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Marshall and Rossman (1995:143) paraphrased Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model of trustworthiness to answer the following questions:

- How credible are the particular findings of the study? By what criteria can one judge them?
- How transferable and applicable are these findings to another setting or group of people?
- How can one be reasonably sure that the findings would be replicated if the study were conducted with the same participants in the same context?
- How can one be sure that the findings are reflective of the subjects and the inquiry itself, rather than a creation of the researcher's biases or prejudices?

Lincoln and Guba (1985:290) refer to these questions as establishing the "truth value" of the study i.e. its applicability, consistency and neutrality. These questions will be answered in the final chapter.

### **3.9. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the themes, specific guidelines will be developed. Specific conclusions based on content, methodology and theory will also be made. The study adds value to practice by means of recommendations. The guidelines are specific to practice and can be used by social workers when developing a marriage enrichment intervention programme.

### **3.10 SUMMARY**

This chapter focused exclusively on the methodology that will be used in the research process. It gave an explanation of qualitative research and focus group interviews as a method to gather and analyse data within the research process. A step-by-step approach of data collection and data analysis was also provided.