CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Emerson, in Tutty, Rothery and Grinnel (1996:4), contends that “qualitative research is the study of people in their natural environment as they go about their daily lives”. These authors further stated that qualitative research tries to understand how people live, how they talk and behave, and what captivates and distresses them and, most importantly, it strives to understand the meaning people’s words and behaviours have for them.

In this chapter the qualitative research process that this study research employed will be outlined with respect to the specific phases that created the whole. Wagner (1998) also stated that during the qualitative study the researcher attempts to capture aspects of the social world such as sights, odours for which it is difficult to develop precise measures expressed as numbers.

2.2 THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS

Neuman (1997:66) defines research as a process and articulates it as follows: “Research is a process of seeking, by means of methodological inquiry, to solve problems and to add to one’s own body of knowledge and of others the discovery of significant facts and insights”.

Tutty, et al. (1996:122) argue that the process of research is largely circular in configuration in the sense that it begins with the problem and ends with the problem resolved. This circular nature of the research process is also highlighted in De Vos (1998) and Rubin and Babbie (1997:94-97). The researcher differs in some respects from Neuman (1997) but she would agree that her experience with this study confirmed that the research process appears to be circular in configuration.
Nonetheless the researcher has not experienced the research process as “ending” with the problem resolved but rather containing a new beginning in the ending. Several authors have delineated the various phases of the qualitative process (compare De Vos (1998) and Tutty, Rothery and Grinnel, Jr (1997)). In this study the researcher employed the work of De Vos (1998).

The reasons for selecting De Vos (1998) are as follows: the researcher has found this author to be simple and understandable, and his focus is on qualitative research. He has incorporated the perspectives of various other authors, which challenged the researcher of this study to be flexible in her thinking – a quality that appears to be important for a qualitative researcher to have.

De Vos (1998) outlined the following phases as phases of the qualitative research:

- Phase one – Choosing the research problem, topic or theme.
- Phase two – Deciding to use a qualitative research approach.
- Phase three – Selecting the qualitative design.
- Phase four – Preparing the data collection.
- Phase five – Data collection and analysis.
- Phase six – Data verification.
- Phase seven – Report writing.

The chapter provides an in-depth description of the research plan. The researcher developed the following graphic:
For the purpose of this research study, the phases mentioned above were modified as follows:

- Phase one – choosing the research problem, topic or theme.
- Phase two – choosing the qualitative approach and selecting the qualitative design.
- Phase three – data collection.
- Phase four – data analysis.
- Phase five – data verification.
- Phase six – report writing.
2.2.1 Choosing the research problem

This is the first phase of the qualitative research process. This is the starting point and is the foundation of the entire research process: definition of the research problem.

In the previous chapter (section 1.1) the central problem of the study was defined as follows: “Do our belief systems influence our knowledge/behaviour towards HIV/AIDS?”

2.2.2 Choosing the qualitative approach and selecting the qualitative research design

Tutty, et al. (1996) mentioned that both qualitative and quantitative research approaches contribute to our knowledge base in different and complementary ways. The second phase of the qualitative researcher thus requires the researcher to consider all the underlying assumptions or basic characteristics of the qualitative perspective, in order to make a decision concerning the appropriateness of the qualitative paradigm for the given research study (De Vos, 1998).

Cresswell (1994) mentions that when the research is of a qualitative nature, it is very important to highlight some of the basic assumptions underlying the qualitative methodology. The following are the basic assumptions that directed this research study:

- The qualitative process is inductive, as the researcher starts with the observed data in a particular situation and then develops a generalization that explains the relationship between the objects observed (Rubin & Babbie, 1997:45). Theory or hypotheses are thus not established prior to the research.

- Qualitative research is descriptive, as the researcher is interested in process, meaning and understanding acquired knowledge through words or pictures rather than through numbers. The focus is therefore on the subjective
exploration of reality from the perspectives of the insiders, in comparison with the outsiders' perspectives that are dominant in the quantitative paradigm (Schurink, in De Vos, 1998).

- Qualitative research is interpretative: “the aim of qualitative research is not to explain human behaviour in terms of universally valid rules or generalization but to understand and interpret the meaning and intentions that underlie everyday human action” (Mouton, 1997 in Schurink & Schurink, 1998:30).

- Qualitative research employs a holistic approach that emphasizes that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Consequently, qualitative methods seek to understand phenomena in their totality by highlighting the importance of the social context for understanding the given phenomena (Rudestam & Newton, 1992; Neuman, 1997).

- Qualitative research is primarily interested in meaning – in other words, in how people make sense of their world, lives and experience.

- Qualitative research involves field work, since the researcher goes to the people, their setting, site or situation in order to observe and record the phenomena in their natural setting. It is thus a discovery-orientated approach in the natural environment and the researcher is subsequently the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.

- Qualitative research is contextual: in other words, it aims to focus on the specific properties that pertain to a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:96). These properties include the location of events and incidents pertaining to a phenomenon along a dimension range. Talbott (1994:93) argues that the context therefore explains why certain attributes of a phenomenon appear when they do and how they are interconnected.

This study falls within the qualitative approach. During this study there were no pre-conceived ideas or categories of capacities that the researcher had in mind,
and there was no literature or related research that was consulted before the data collection method. The reason for this was that the researcher was not seeking to validate any pre-selected theoretical framework, but rather to approach the data without preconceptions and to accept all the data as given. The other reason for choosing the qualitative way is that the researcher realised that doing a research on HIV/AIDS was too wide for her. She therefore narrowed topic down and she focused on Xhosa-speaking people. She was also sensitive to the fact that people ignore the information that elderly people might have on the issue of HIV/AIDS.

2.2.3 Data collection

This phase includes the following aspects: defining the population, selecting the sampling procedure, selecting the method of data collection and deciding on the specific role that the researcher undertakes (De Vos, 1998). Mention was also made in Chapter 1 that “any research project needs to identify the parameters for data collection by defining the setting (where the research will take place), the actors (the informants who will be interviewed or observed), the events (what the actors will be interviewed about or observed doing) and the process (the evolving nature of events undertaken by the actors within the setting)” (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The elderly Xhosa will be observed in terms of their views about HIV/AIDS and their imagination regarding the cure and treatment of HIV/AIDS.

In establishing a data collection method the researcher made use of the work of authors such as De Vos (1998), and Miles and Huberman (1984; in Cresswell, 1994). The following are factors considered by these authors in establishing a data collection method:

- The setting which the researcher perceives as most important to the population.
- The informants/respondents that were interviewed, their selection and preparation.
- The method of data collection.
- And lastly, the role that the researcher undertakes.
The setting in which this research took place can be described as a township area situated in the Johannesburg area (or Gauteng region). The researcher chose non-probability convenience sampling (also known as accidental, haphazard sampling) because she has known the informants for a long time – especially those who are staying with her in the same street and same yard. The township is also convenient and the researcher is able to select the respondents because they know her and felt free to talk to her.

Table 2.1: Demographic representation of respondents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. MamoXhwathi</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>70 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mathodzama</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>67 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mr. Ncgobo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>69 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Hokwane</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>73 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Chicks</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>75 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dube</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>68 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Mxina</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>75 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Ngema</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>70 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Nyathi</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>71 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Nomsa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>65 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents that were identified were elderly Xhosa-speaking people within Alexandra Township. In selecting the respondents the researcher used non-probability or judgmental sampling. This sampling procedure helped the researcher to employ her judgment who was purposefully selecting the information that she perceived as answering her research question. Therefore the researcher was able to choose ten respondents out of the whole population.

From all of the above it can be deduced that personal interviewing was the preferred method used during the interview. One of the reasons for using the semi-structured interview was that the first attempt at conducting a focus group
failed. This was the researcher’s first plan for her data collection method. It was also difficult to get respondents, especially elderly people, because the majority of them are found in the ‘homelands’ such as Transkei, and around the East London, Cape Town and Durban areas.

The semi-structured interview allows the researcher to be flexible in making appointments with respondents, whereas the focus group would require greater rigidity. Informants can also be free and open during the interview. This method also provided the researcher with the flexibility to establish the meaning of the informants’ answers by probing for more information and clarifying the answers. The use of verbal and non-verbal probing also enhanced the reliability of the data as it enabled the researcher to explore and clarify inconsistencies in the informants’ accounts, to establish a sense of report and, consequently, to reduce the risk of getting socially desirable answers.

In conducting the interview the researcher used audio-taping and also field notes. The conversations were later transcribed verbatim. All ten interviews were conducted in the Alex Township location in settings convenient and available to the respondents. The purpose and nature of the research was outlined at the start of each interview and the interviewee was reminded of his/her rights before the interview started. Seven questions were posed to the respondents. These seven questions were as non-directive as possible, while they still guided the interview towards the area of study that was of interest to the researcher. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1991) the sequence of the questions must range from broad to specific.

The first thing that the researcher did when she approached the informants was to greet them and to conduct a general conversation, as this was considered as a warm-up before getting into the in-depth interview itself.

Kruger (1994:54-55) and Lincoln and Guba (1985:270) are of the opinion that “informants should be given an opportunity to ‘warm up’ by being asked some general questions that can give them practice in talking to the researcher and this allows him/her direct and organize his/her thoughts”.

The following questions were posed to the informants:

1. How do people get HIV/AIDS?
2. How do people avoid getting HIV/AIDS?
3. Who get AIDS?
4. How can HIV/AIDS be treated or cured?
5. How can people get AIDS out of their system?
6. Who brought HIV/AIDS?
7. Do you know anyone who has HIV/AIDS and how do you think the person was infected?

All ten interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. It is important to remember that the method used during the data collection method is a small tape-recorder, transcripts and field notes. The following are the advantages of the data collection methods mentioned above.

**Data-presentation:** Morgan (1998) stated that “a high quality tape-recorder strategically placed to capture the dialogue between the researcher and participants is a necessary piece of equipment.” Burgess (1995) further contends that tape-recording has the advantage of freeing the interviewer to take part in the interviews and also frees him/her from the necessity of taking copious notes. Burgess (1995) also stated the fact that some people feel very uncomfortable about having their answers taped and can be more cautious about what they say.

**Field notes:** Powney and Watts in Curriculum and Society (1998) mentioned that “notes taking can be difficult at the speed of normal discourse and can also impede interviewers’ concentration upon the flow of respondents’ responses”. These authors further stated that field note taking is very important because the researcher is able to note down some other things like the interviewee’s anxiety which cannot be recorded by the tape-recorder. The value of field notes to the researcher was that she was able to observe the non-verbal messages during the interview and she also gained experience of learning to write facts faster within a short period of time.
2.2.4 The data analysis

De Vos (1998:343) mentioned the following eight steps as steps that one can consider during the data analysis. In this study the researcher used Tesch’s approach (1990:154-156) to data analysis. The reader is reminded that these eight steps were reduced to five by the researcher of this study (refer back to par. 1.10). These steps were the following:

**Step one** – Reading carefully through all the transcripts to get a sense of the data as a whole.

**Step two** – Picking any transcript file and reading through it, jotting down ideas as they come to mind, asking oneself what the interview is about, while writing thoughts in the margin and identifying the major categories represented in the universum.

**Step three** – Reading through the entire transcript files again and underlining units of meaning related to the identified major categories.

**Step four** – Putting the units of meaning into major categories while at the same time identifying subcategories within the major categories.

**Step five** – Identifying relationships between major- and subcategories and formulating new patterns as conclusions are drawn.

2.2.5 Data verification

The researcher of this study used Guba’s model (in Krefting, 1991). It is important to remind the reader that this model consists of the following four criteria:

1. truth value;
2. applicability;
3. consistency; and
4. neutrality.

The actions that were taken in ensuring trustworthiness are prolonged and varied engagement in the identified Alex location, triangulation, peer examination of the research methodology and implementation, interviewing techniques and skills such as probing, clarifying and reframing, establishing the research’s authority, and dense description of the research methodology. An explanation of all these criteria is attempted in Chapter 3.