CHAPTER 1

AN OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND

Innovative research on unknown issues in a society is one of the important goals of qualitative research (De Vos, 1998). Although much is known about HIV/AIDS within a Western context; much research within an African context is still needed. It seems from practice that little is known about belief systems of African people regarding HIV/AIDS. According to Taggart (1990): “Belief systems represent all the beliefs, sets, expectations or hypotheses, conscious and unconscious, that a person at a given time accepts as true of the world he lives in”.

This research focuses on one specific African group, namely Xhosa-speaking people.

As a social matter the severity of HIV/AIDS in South-Africa, is observed. The limitation of knowledge on indigenous beliefs limits the work of a social worker. Therefore, this study aims to provide more indigenous information.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is a global phenomenon that seems highly dynamic and unstable. The major impact of this disease is possible yet to be seen. It is not clear whether every HIV-infected person will progress to develop illness and AIDS but most people who are HIV-infected will have developed AIDS within 12 years of contracting the virus.

Therefore in this research study the aim is to determine the belief systems of the elderly Xhosa-speaking people on HIV/AIDS and to come to some conclusions on how these belief systems influence their knowledge of AIDS. The researcher is of the opinion that myths about HIV/AIDS still exist amongst Xhosa-speaking people. It is important to identify these myths, in order to streamline practice.
1.2 MOTIVATION OF STUDY

In undertaking this study, the researcher was motivated by the way in which a child of one of her community members was ill but later recovered due to the family’s beliefs. This family was from the Xhosa-speaking group. The family went to medical doctors and a lot of money was spent but the child would not get better. The most amazing part of this story was that the parents were from different cultural backgrounds, but the dominating culture that was followed in this family was the Xhosa one. The child suffered from a “stroke” and people in that community believed that it is difficult to cure the disease but the mother of the child told the whole family about her beliefs in their culture and people disagreed with her. She said her child would recover if they were to take him to African doctors, and she also mentioned that she adheres to her cultural values and morals. In the end the child recovered. As a social worker the researcher is interested in doing a scientific enquiry about Xhosa beliefs regarding the HIV/AIDS epidemic and she wants to hear their views about the way people can treat and address AIDS.

Elliot (1990:120) says that “Superstition among the Xhosa as among the Bantu tribes is strong and this is part of their way of life”. The author further mentions that it is so important that the Xhosa people attribute most misfortune, illness and anything for which they cannot find an explanation to unnatural or supernatural influences. It is also mentioned by Elliot that in order to combat illness the Xhosa rely on magic, medicine and witchcraft.

Elliot (1992:34) proposes that in order to understand the Xhosa people, one must understand and accept the way their minds work. In understanding these people’s world, moreover, one must not ridicule their beliefs but appreciate the Xhosa world of imagination and see things as they see them.

1.3 THE RESEARCH QUESTION, GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

De Vos (1998) proposes that “research always commences with one or more questions or hypotheses”. She also mentions that research questions are relevant if the researcher works qualitatively, while hypotheses are relevant when the
researcher is working quantitatively. This research study poses a grand tour question. Cresswell (1994) describes the grand tour question as a “statement of the question being examined in the study which is in a general form”. The author further mentions that this question is consistent with the emerging methodology of qualitative designs and is opposed as a general issue so as to limit the inquiry.

The grand tour question of this study is “What are the belief systems of the Xhosa-speaking people about HIV/AIDS?”

Research question:
What are the belief systems of elderly Xhosa-speaking people concerning HIV/AIDS?

Problem statement:
How do our belief systems influence our knowledge of HIV/AIDS?

Nel and Smook (1999) define a goal as a long-range preference statement of what is to be accomplished and they describe objectives as specific statements of progress towards goal attainment. “Objectives are output orientated rather than process orientated, thus they are stated in measurable terms and they are time bound, realistic, relevant to the needs and goals and they must be attainable in a fairly short period of time” (Nel & Smook, 1999). In this study the goal is informed by the research question.

The following goal and related objectives directed the exploration of the stated research question:

Goal:
To explore belief systems of elderly Xhosa-speaking people on HIV/AIDS.

Objectives:
- To explore and describe the belief systems of elderly Xhosa-speaking people on HIV/AIDS, through an empirical study.
- To link the beliefs of the respondents with literature.
• To reach conclusions on how these belief systems influence their knowledge of HIV/AIDS.
• To make recommendations regarding belief systems.

1.4 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology of this study will be discussed more in-depth in Chapter 2. Hence this section will for the purpose of orientation present a brief summary of the research methodology under the following headings:

• type of research
• research design
• data collection
• data analysis
• data verification
• ethical considerations
• Lastly will be the limitations of the research study

1.5 TYPE OF RESEARCH

This study is qualitative in nature and follows a descriptive design as identified by De Vos (2003). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define a qualitative research as being multidimensional in focus and involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Qualitative researchers therefore study phenomena in their natural settings. They may attempt to describe, make sense of, interpret or reconstruct phenomena in terms of the meaning that people bring to them.

Tutty, Rottery and Grinnel (1997) mention that “qualitative research is the study of people in their natural environment as they go about their lives”. These authors further said that qualitative research tries to understand how people live, how they talk and behave and what captivates and distresses them. More importantly it strives to understand the meaning that people’s words and behaviours have for
them. Reid and Smith in De Vos (1998:72) identify specific situations where the qualitative approach would be an appropriate choice:

- The researcher attempts to gain a firsthand, holistic understanding of phenomena of interest by means of a flexible strategy of problem formulation and data collection,
- Methods such as participant observation and unstructured interviews are used to acquire an in-depth knowledge used to guide further study,
- Qualitative methodology rests on the assumption that valid understanding can be gained through accumulated knowledge acquired firsthand by a single researcher.
- Finally, the researcher has to work according to a plan of action.

Marshall and Rossman in De Vos (1998) offer the following guidelines on situations where the qualitative approach would be the appropriate choice:

- Research that cannot be done experimentally for practical or ethical reasons.
- Research that delves in-depth into complexities and processes.
- Research for which relevant variables have yet to be identified.
- Research of unknown society or innovative systems.
- Research on informal and unstructured linkages and process in organizations.
- Research on real, as opposed to stated, organizational goals.

The decision to use the qualitative approach or paradigm for this research study is motivated by reasons similar to those identified by Marshall and Rossman in De Vos (1998). This research is relevant to the South African context because it is an in-depth study which aims at exploring and understanding the belief systems of the Xhosa-speaking people. The researcher is interested in developing an in-depth understanding of these beliefs.
1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

Different research designs are suggested when following the qualitative approach. These are ethnography, interpretation of documents and records and others (De Vos, 1998). The specific research design that is been employed for the purpose of this study is the phenomenological design. Phenomenology is selected as this approach attempts to understand and interpret the meaning that people give to their daily lives by examining detailed descriptions of their experiences. The researcher chose this design because it gives in-depth information about the way people interpret and understand their daily lives (Cresswell, 1994). Qualitative design is not concerned with explanations (what causes), but with what is (Rubin & Babbie, 1997). With the use of this design the researcher will attempts to explore and describe the belief systems of elderly Xhosa-speaking people on HIV/Aids.

1.7 TYPE OF SAMPLING

The setting in which this research study will take place can be described as a township area: it will take place in Alexandra, which is situated in the greater Johannesburg or Gauteng area. Non-probability convenience sampling – also known as accidental, haphazard sampling is used in identifying the belief systems among the Xhosa-speaking people on HIV/Aids.

The respondents who will be interviewed are elderly Xhosa-speaking people. A non-probability purposive sampling will be employed to select the particular subjects from the larger target group of elderly Xhosa-speaking people within the above-mentioned area. As such this sampling procedure, which is akin to the qualitative approach, employs the judgement of the researcher to purposively select respondents who are best suited to answer the research question. (Compare De Vos, 1998; Cresswell, 1994; Neuman, 1997.) The researcher will select 10 respondents from the whole community because of the financial cost of the study and the shortage of respondents, as the majority of elderly Xhosa people are found in the so-called ‘homelands’ and rural areas.
1.8 THE DATA COLLECTION METHOD

From the aforementioned discussion it can be deduced that personal interviewing will be the method of data collection of this study. Interviewing is a typical data collection method in phenomenologically orientated research, according to Neuman (1997). The author defines the qualitative research interview as an “interview whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life world of the respondents with respect to interpretation of meaning of the described phenomena.”

The semi-structured interview is selected for two reasons: firstly it is an excellent method in the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of the respondents regarding the complex issues. It allowed the researcher to be flexible in establishing what the respondents were trying to convey: answers were gained by probing for more information and clarification during the interview. Ten respondents will be the optimum number for this study. These interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed word for word. These transcriptions consequently constitute the material for subsequent interpretation of meaning (Neuman, 1997). The other method which will be used is field notes, which will be taken during the interviews.

1.9 CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Neuman (1997), in his description of “good informants”, says “Good informants are comfortable and unrestrained in their interaction with the researcher”. He further mentions the fact that good informants are generally open and truthful, although they may sometimes not speak or they cover up. Neuman (1997) also indicates that good informants provide solid answers with good detail and they stay on the topic or related important issues and they are thoughtful and willing to reflect on what they say.

The role of the researcher in this study can be described as that of observer. In this role she will be considered as a researcher and she will interact on an informal
level and with the respondents and various other elderly Xhosa-speaking people. (Compare De Vos, 1998; Gold in Rubin and Babbie, 1997:379.)

1.10 DATA ANALYSIS

Neuman (1997) and De Vos (1998) indicate that data analysis in qualitative research is eclectic as there is no right or wrong way to analyse data. These authors propose that in qualitative studies data analysis is not either wrong or right. The eight steps of Tesch’s approach to data analysis (cited in De Vos 1998) were adopted, although these were reduced to five first steps. These steps will be described in detail in Chapter 2. These eight steps of Tesch was selected due to its clarity and purpose.

Tesch’s approach to data analysis is as follows:

**Step one** – Reading carefully through all the transcripts to get a sense of the data as a whole. During this phase the researcher can jot down ideas as they come to mind.

**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.

In this step the researcher selects one interview – for example, the most interesting, the shortest, the one at the top of the pile – and goes through it asking “what is this about?” and thinking about the underlying meaning in the information. The researcher writes thoughts that come up in the margin.

**Step three** – When the researcher has completed this task for several respondents, a list is made of all the topics. Similar topics are clustered together and formed into columns that might be arranged into major topics, unique topics and leftovers.
Step four – The researcher takes the list and returns to the data. The topics are abbreviated as codes and the codes written next to the appropriate segments of the text. The researcher tries out this preliminary organizing scheme to see whether new categories and codes emerge.

Step five – The researcher finds the most descriptive wording for the topics and turns them into categories. He/she endeavours to reduce the total list of categories by grouping together topics that relate to each other. Lines are drawn between the categories to show interesting relationships.

Step six – The researcher makes a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetises the codes.

Step seven – The data material belonging to each category is assembled in one place and a preliminary analysis is performed.

Step eight – The researcher recodes existing data if necessary.

The researcher reduced these steps into five:

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.

1.11 DATA VERIFICATION

Data verification will be according to Guba’s Model of Trustworthiness (in Krefting, 1991:215-216). According to Guba (in Krefting, 1991), the model of trustworthiness consists of four criteria: truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. Each of these criteria will be discussed in-depth in Chapter 3. Guba’s model was selected for the following reasons.

Krefting (1991) contends that this model is conceptually well developed and has been used by qualitative researchers for decades. The model was understandable and was also of more interest to the researcher during the workshop that was presented by Dr. Roestenburg and Dr. Oliphant in their qualitative data presentation in February, 2001.

1.12 THE PLACE OF LITERATURE

This is a qualitative study and aims to provide new knowledge. For qualitative purposes the literature in this study is used to validate results (themes). Literature is not used to set a basic framework. In order to clarify the results and establish the status of myths, the researcher will provide a comprehensive literature control. The literature control provides general and specific information on HIV/AIDS.

1.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Researcher’s authority
  
  Krefting (1991:220) mentions that “the qualitative researcher is a measurement tool”. The researcher had no prior experience in doing qualitative research. Her lecturers in the master’s programme do however have experience in doing qualitative research. They include Prof. Roestenburg, Dr. Oliphant and Prof. Fouché, who is the researcher’s supervisor and also the head of the Social
Work Department. All of the above-mentioned lecturers have doctorates and experience in doing research.

The researcher has successfully completed her undergraduate course that included either quantitative or qualitative research methodology.

Lastly, concerning the data collection method, the researcher had knowledge of interviewing skills and techniques and had extensive experience in applying these skills as a facilitator during her third year while she was a student social worker.

- **Voluntary participation and informing those concerned**
  Respondents were informed and briefed about the purpose of the study before they agreed to participate. Respondents were also reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

- **Anonymity and confidentiality**
  Anonymity and confidentiality was a right ensured to the informants in that the researcher vowed that under no circumstances would the identity of her informants be made public.

- **Management of information**
  The tape recordings of the interviews as well as the transcripts of the recordings were kept in a safe place for the sake of the data analysis.

### 1.14 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The following aspects are considered as limitations of the research study:

- **Research bias:** the researcher approaches this research without explicit conceptual frameworks regarding the topic of the study due to the inductive nature of the research.
• No pilot study will be undertaken: the questions that will be posed in the interview were however discussed with the researcher’s supervisor before the interview.
• No member checking will be done.

1.15 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.15.1 HIV:

Soul City Institute of Health and Development Communication (2004) defines HIV as the Human Immune-deficiency Virus which is transmitted through blood, semen and vaginal fluid. This source also indicates that as the amount of HIV in the body increases the number of CD4 cells decreases. This can weaken the body further causing full-blown AIDS. HIV/AIDS Management in South Africa (1996) states that “HIV” stands for Human Immune-deficiency Virus and further described it as a “a group of extremely small micro-organisms that can only survive inside the cells of other living creatures”.

The Human Immune-deficiency Virus is a retrovirus. This means it belongs to a family of viruses that have a unique ability. They make DNA – the blueprint for genetic replication – out of RNA (Miller, 2000).

1.15.2 AIDS:

According to the HIV/AIDS Management in South Africa (1999), AIDS stands for the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Soul City Institute of Health Development and Communication (2004) agrees that AIDS is the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, meaning that there is a collection of diseases that are acquired from HIV and the immune system is no longer protecting the body from illness. As HIV weakens the immune system the person will develop a number of diseases that the body will no longer be able to fight off and these are known as opportunistic infections. When a person’s immune system has deteriorated so much that he or she starts becoming ill with life-threatening unusual illnesses he or she is said to have AIDS (Soul City Institute of Health Development and Communication, 2004).
Aids mean Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Aids is a state of immune suppression caused by the HIVL-III retrovirus. This virus infects a subset of peripheral blood lymphocytes (the T-helper cells), which orchestrate many of the functions of the cellular immune system. People with Aids may suffer either life-threatening opportunistic infections or tumours or both. The life-threatening opportunistic infections fall into three main categories: those affecting the lungs, those affecting the gut, and those affecting the nervous system (Miller, 2000).

1.15.3 Belief system:

Ellis (1993) proposes that “A belief system is a set of beliefs”. He further says that in order to describe a belief system we must say what beliefs occur in it. The above author also said that in describing belief systems we must at least say which sentences of a language are accepted as true, which are considered as false and which ones are not yet decided. Ellis (1993) mentions that such a description will be incomplete because there are degrees of beliefs other than conviction of truth and falsity and there also may be certain dynamic properties of belief systems which depend on how dogmatically beliefs are held.

1.16 AN OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

The research report is divided into the following chapters:

- **Chapter 1** is an overview of the whole research study, which consists of an introduction and general orientation, the problem formulation, the research question, goal and objectives, the research methodology, ethical considerations, limitations of the research and the clarification of key concepts.

- **Chapter 2** is based on the researcher’s application of the qualitative research process. The following aspects will be discussed in this chapter: the selection of the research problem, rationale for the use of the qualitative research approach, the qualitative research design, data collection, data analysis and verification.
• **Chapter 3** will present the data as refined themes.

• **Chapter 4** includes interpretation of the research findings and these findings will be compared and contrasted with related literature and research.

• **Chapter 5** will provide a summary of the research report as well as an outline of the overall conclusions and recommendations.