

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives an outline of research methods that were followed in the study. It provides information on the participants, that is, the criteria for inclusion in the study, who the participants were and how they were sampled. The researcher describes the research design that was chosen for the purpose of this study and the reasons for this choice. The instrument that was used for data collection is also described and the procedures that were followed to carry out this study are included. The researcher also discusses the methods used to analyze the data. Lastly, the ethical issues that were followed in the process are also discussed.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is exploratory in nature as it attempts to explore the experiences of mothers of incest survivors. Their subjective perceptions formed the core data of the study; hence it needed the method that would deal with the topic in an exploratory nature.

For the purpose of this study, the research paradigm that was followed is of qualitative nature, using semi-structured interviews as discussed later in the chapter. Leedy (1993) explains that qualitative research is based on the belief that first hand experience provides the most meaningful data. It is also believed that qualitative data gives large volumes of quality data from a limited number of people. It is aimed at understanding the world of participants from their frame of reference (Walker, 1985). It would have been impossible to make a quantitative evaluation on this study because it is based on the perception of people and cannot be scientifically measured.

Westerland (1992, cited by Mashego, 2000) suggests that since incest is a complex subject, the suitable method for data collection would be a qualitative one because of its ability to bring out experiences of the participants in both exploratory and descriptive forms.

In qualitative research, the researcher is in continuous interaction with the participant in an attempt to discover the participants meaning of his/her life world (Mashego, 2000; Neuman, 2000).

3. PARTICIPANTS

The participants consisted of seven biological mothers of daughters who had been sexually abused by the mother's partner who was the child's biological father, legal step-father or mother's live-in boyfriend or common law husband. The subjects consisted of four Black mothers, two White mothers and one Coloured mother.

There were some inclusion criteria used for participating in the study. Those included the following:

- The subjects had to be the biological mother to the sexually abused daughter.
- The sexually-abused daughter had to be between the ages of 5 and 11 years at the time of the abuse as Nash et al. (1990) state that the child's memory improves around pre-school years, thus they can give some account of the event. The authors further indicate that this is the critical period for socialization, thus the child becomes more bonded to the mother. Louw et al. (1998) states that from the ages of 4 years the child's cognitive, emotional and social development begins, hence a warm and supportive environment from parents is important for learning and modeling behaviors. Also, as the child reaches 12 years, which is a pre-adolescent stage, it is posited that she can stop the abuse by either running away or threatening to tell.

- The perpetrator had to be the mother's partner who could be the biological father to the child or a step-father (either legally married to the mother, common-law or live-in partner).
- The mother and her partner had to be in the relationship and staying together at the time of the abuse, that is, neither separated nor divorced.
- The disclosure had to have taken place between 6 months to 2 years prior to the time of the interview as the researcher assumed that within this time frame, the participant would have dealt with the initial shock and trauma, at the same time she could still reflect on her experiences of the event.
- The sexual abuse had to have been substantiated by the child's disclosure together with the police, medical professionals or child welfare authorities.

According to Neuman (2000), the focus of the qualitative researcher is more on the selected participants' ability to clarify and deepen the understanding of social life than its representativeness. He further indicated that the qualitative researcher should be concerned with obtaining cases that can enhance his learning process about social life in a specific context, and that is the reason why they tend to use a non-probability sampling method.

In non-probability sampling, subjects are chosen according to their relevance to the research topic because the aim is to gain a deeper understanding than to generalize to a larger population (Neuman, 2000). The researcher used purposive type of non-probability sampling. Neuman (2000) describes purposive non-probability sampling as making use of experts who work with the prospective subjects to get cases which are informative. He further indicated that this method is mostly useful in exploratory research of a difficult to reach group as the researcher uses the locations she knows to access to suitable cases for.

Mothers were recruited through the agencies that provide services for the sexually-abused children and their families. These included the Teddy Bear clinic in Transwerk Memorial Institute (TMI), which is a division of Johannesburg General Hospital, running the Child and Family Unit that runs therapy programmes for sexually-abused children and their

mothers, and also prepare those children for court if they have to appear in Court; and Child Abuse Treatment and Training Services (CATTS), which is the division of the Johannesburg Child Welfare that provide services to sexually-abused children and refer them accordingly. They run the individual and group programme for the offenders, and at the time of this research were planning on starting a support group for mothers of sexually-abused children. This research was done through the Programme Managers who would approach the mothers, explain to them what the study was about. For those who were are willing to participate, the researcher was either given their contact details to set up an appointment with them or the manager would make an appointment with them on the researcher's behalf on a day that was suitable to both parties.

On the following pages, tables giving some characteristics of the mother, the father/alleged perpetrator, the couple, as well as the daughter are provided:

TABLE I: The Biographical Data of Both Parents

Mother	(n)	Father	(n)
Ages in years		Ages in years	
• 31-33	2	• 36-40	3
• 36-39	4	• 41-45	3
• >40	1	• >60	1
Total	7		7
Highest Level of Education		Highest Level of Education	
• 0-Std 2	2	• Std 2-4	2
• Std 6-9	2	• Std 6-8	2
• Std 10	3	• Std 10+	3
Total	7		7
Employment Status		Employment Status	
• Employed	3	• Employed	4
• Unemployed	3	• Unemployed	3
• Self-employed	1		
Total	7		7

TABLE 2: The Couple's Characteristics

Variable	No.
Marital Status Prior to Disclosure	
• Married Partners	4
• Customary Partners	1
• Live-in Partners	1
• Divorced but later reconciled though never re-married	1
Total	7
Marital Status Post Disclosure	
• Married and Living Together	3
• Separated	2
• Divorced	2
Total	7
Relationship with the Child	
• Both Biological Parents	3
• One Biological and One Step- parent	4
Total	7

TABLE 3: The Biographical Data of Children and Other Characteristics

Variable	(n)
Ages in years	
• 6-8	2
• 9-11	4
• 12-14	3
Total	9
Schooling	
• Pre-school	1
• Primary School	8
Total	9
Relationship with perpetrator	
• Biological Children	5
• Step-children	4
Total	9

In some families, more than one child was sexually-abused and this explains why the number of children is 9 as opposed to 7 mothers.

The mothers' ages ranged between 31-48 years, with the mean age of 37.4 years, and their children's ranged between 6-13 years, with the mean of 8.75 years, at the time of the interview. The fathers' ages ranged between 36-63 years, with the mean of 37.8 years. Of the seven mothers, two had two daughters each who had been incestuously abused by their fathers, but one of the second daughters was already out of age range according to criteria, although the abuse had taken place since she was 6 years old. This particular mother spoke a lot about this other daughter's abuse, and the researcher allowed her the time and space to talk about that experience.

Among the couples, four were married to their partners, one were customary partners, one couple were live-in partners and one had been divorced a few years ago, but they had got back together at the time of the abuse allegations. In five couples, one or both partners were either divorcees or had separated from long-term relationships prior to the current ones.

Three of the perpetrators were biological fathers whilst four were step-fathers. At the time of the interview, four participant mothers had either separated from or divorced the partners, whilst three were still together with their spouses, although one of these three had run away from home for reasons unrelated to the child's sexual abuse allegations. All but one child were in primary school, and this child was in preschool. The participant mothers' educational background ranged from Grades 4 to 12, with only one who never went to school. The fathers' ranged between Grades 4 to tertiary-level. Although none of the participant mothers had tertiary-level qualifications, three of the mothers worked in the corporate world holding office jobs whilst three were unemployed and one was a traditional healer, hence she was self-employed. Four fathers were also employed in the corporate world and holding high positions whilst the other three were unemployed as a result of retrenchments. The five subjects resided in Johannesburg and surrounding areas.

4. INSTRUMENT

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used semi-structured in-depth clinical interviews, which involved both direct questioning using open-ended questions and also the clinical observations of the mothers as they related their experiences. In addition to open-ended questions, there were closed-ended questions that were used to obtain the demographic data on the mother, the father and the child.

The first section of the questionnaire covered the biographical information of the child, the mother and the alleged perpetrator. It also included the brief background history of the mother's and the father's families of origin. The second section explored the family situation before the sexual abuse allegations, and the last section explored the sexual abuse itself, the process of discovery/disclosure, maternal response to that and the psychological impact it had on both the mother and the child and on the relationship amongst the family members, with specific focus on that of the mother and her daughter. Also, it explored the actions that were taken by the mother upon discovery and her feelings about those. (See Appendix IV).

Since this is an exploratory study, the use of a semi-structured interview allowed the researcher some flexibility in the way she worded the questions for each individual participant. It also gave the researcher the opportunity to probe for more information and clarification where necessary (Kvale, 1996; Walker, 1985).

According to Neuman (2000), the researcher needs to have a skill to match the research question to an appropriate technique. This author further stated that for exploratory research, open-ended questionnaires are the most effective. This view supports that of Riessman (1993, p.54), when he pointed out that it is useful "...to ask questions that open up the topic and allow respondents to construct answers in collaboration with the listeners, in ways they find meaningful."

How the participants tell their stories is suggestive of what meaning they attach to their experiences. This is in line with Neuman's (2000) point that the researcher needs to note the non-verbal communication as it might add meaning to the content of the participants' stories.

5. PROCEDURE

The initial contact was made with the professionals in charge of the institutions that provide services for the sexually-abused children and their families. Letters were sent out explaining the research aims to them and requesting assistance with obtaining the sample. Some agencies never responded even when the follow-up was made, whereas others were willing to assist but did not have people who met the criteria for participating as described earlier in the chapter. In other instances, mothers who would have been contacted had either given wrong contact details to the agencies hence could not be located, or their numbers were not working. On two occasions two different agencies had referred mothers who did not meet the criteria as one was the grandmother of which the mother of the sexually-abused child was deceased, and the other one was the mother's sister who, according to Black African culture is the mother to that child, especially because she had brought her up.

On meeting the mothers, a brief description of the purpose of the study was explained verbally, and they were also given written information about the study, which included that participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at anytime without any negative consequences, and also, assurance about confidentiality and anonymity. These measures were aimed at ensuring informed consent, which the mothers signed afterwards. Consent to record the interviews with audiotape was also obtained.

All the interviews were conducted by the researcher since, according to Mashego (2000), incest is a very sensitive topic, it needs a skilled interviewer who has an ability for empathic understanding of the mothers' predicaments, and who could listen with greater sensitivity towards them. Some interviews were conducted in the offices of the referring

agency, others in the participants' homes and also in the researcher's office. All but one interview took between 60-100 minutes, which depended on the amount of probing done by the interviewer for each individual participant to reflect on her experiences. This also depended on each individual's emotional state at the time of an interview. One interview took about 150 minutes as the participant was eager to talk about her experience. There were all audio-recorded. The interviews were conducted in the language of each participant's preference, of which three were in English, three in Zulu and one in Sotho.

According to Programme Managers who assisted in obtaining and accessing the sample, a number of mothers refused to participate whilst others agreed and either did not turn up for their appointment, changed their minds, or, at the last minute, cancelled telephonically. But those mothers who participated were interested in the study and willing to share their experiences with the researcher.

After the interview, some mothers required debriefing which was done at that point. Some were provided with contact details of the Wits Trauma Clinic and Transwerk Memorial Institute (TMI), for further debriefing sessions.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of qualitative data involves interpretation and an attempt in understanding the subjects' world "...as they construct it" (Jones, 1985b, cited in Hooper, 1992, p. 29). This is done through the process of organizing the data from the transcripts or field notes in a way that would increase a researcher's understanding and also for better presentation of the findings (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1982, cited in Carter, 1990). Mthembu (2000) refers to these notes and transcripts as raw data that need to be converted into refined data for better analysis by the researcher.

The researcher in this study transcribed the interviews from the tapes in the language that was used and those that were conducted in other languages other than English were translated into English. The transcripts were then read several times and in the process

the list of various themes that emerged was made. On several occasions the researcher had to re-listen to the tapes whilst reading the transcript so as to identify the participants' feelings that came with certain responses, for example, where the mother cried as she reflected on her experience. The themes were then grouped according to their similarities, and common or recurring themes were identified for the purpose of making sense of them in relation to the theoretical framework created in the literature review. The above procedure is in line with what authors like Marshall (1995, cited, in Mthembu, 2000) and Neuman (2000) suggest about qualitative data analysis. These authors indicate that in qualitative research the data is analyzed through reading and re-reading of data notes, reflecting on what is read and organizing those into similar themes and patterns.

7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Initially, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants verbally. The participants were then given the subject information sheet, (see Appendix II), which also explained the purpose of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured and they were informed that they were not obliged to participate and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. They were then asked to sign the consent form (see Appendix III), after they had understood what had been explained to them.

The participants kept the subject information sheets and brought back the consent forms. Included in that information sheet were researcher's contact details and those of the Trauma clinic and Transwerk Memorial Institute (TMI), should they need further debriefing due to possibilities of re-traumatization. Consent to tape recording was also obtained, and it was explained that the tapes will be destroyed on completion of the study. Participants were informed that the findings of the study would be kept in the library and that in the event of publication, no names will be used. On transcribing the interviews, the participants and other family members were each assigned letters that were taken from the first letter of their first names and these were used when quoting some sections of the interviews.

8. CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the methodology that was used in this study. An explanation of qualitative research as a method for data collection and analysis was given. Measures followed during the data collection were discussed in this chapter and the information about the sample was provided.