

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a description of the research process. The phenomenological theoretical framework is discussed, followed by a definition of qualitative research. An overview of the research design in this study is thereafter presented. Emphasis is also placed on the sampling procedure, method of data collection and on the method of data analysis. Thereafter aspects concerning the trustworthiness of the research are discussed. Finally, ethical considerations are put forward.

#### **3.2 THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Von Eckartzberg (1986) defines phenomenological psychology as the "study of the fundamental types of psychological phenomena in their subjective aspects only, regardless of their embeddedness in the objective context of a psychological organism" (p. 7). Phenomenology devotes itself to the study of how things appear to consciousness or are given in experience (Giorgi, 1986). It is concerned with phenomena in the strict sense - how things and events are for the consciousness that beholds them and not how they are in themselves.

The empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience (Moustakas, 1994) and attempts to reach the lived world (Kvale, 1983). Phenomenology studies subjects' perspectives on their world and attempts to describe in detail the content and structure of their consciousness, to grasp the qualitative diversity of their experiences and to explicate their essential meanings (Kvale, 1996). He further adds that phenomenology attempts to get beyond immediately experienced meanings in order to articulate the pre-reflective level of lived meanings, to make the invisible visible. It is interested in elucidating both that which appears and the manner in which it appears.

The task of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon as it appears, rather than indulging in attempts to explain it

within a pre-given framework (Kruger, 1988). The phenomenological researcher often has personal experience with a phenomenon and aims to heighten his/her own awareness of the experience, while simultaneously examining the experience through the eyes of others (Leedy, 1997).

### **3.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as a multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Qualitative researchers thus study things in their natural settings, utilising different qualitative techniques and data collection methods and attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

The qualitative researcher focuses on subjective meanings, definitions, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of specific cases and attempts to capture aspects of the social world for which it is difficult to develop precise measures expressed as numbers (Neuman, 1994).

It is the assumption of this researcher that qualitative research will permit a better understanding of intern clinical psychologists' experience of their internship year than quantitative approaches. The researcher intends to approach this study from a phenomenological point of view in which rich descriptions of different individuals' immediate experiences will be sought. The aim is to understand the experience of the internship year as felt, perceived, experienced and actually lived by intern psychologists.

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Mouton (2001) defines a research design as a plan or blueprint of how one intends conducting the research. The research design provides a set of guidelines and instructions on how to reach the goals the researcher has set for himself/herself (Mouton, 1996). The research design of this study is qualitative, using a phenomenological approach with its emphasis on the research respondents' lived experiences and the meanings that they attribute to these.

### **3.5 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

According to Leedy (1997), research is a process through which we attempt to achieve systematically and with the support of data the answer to a question, the resolution of a problem, or a greater understanding of a phenomenon. This process is called the research methodology. The methodological dimension thus refers to the "knowledge of how" or "know-how" to do things or the total set of "means" which scientists employ in reaching their goal of valid knowledge (Mouton, 1996).

An overview of the methodological approach that will be applied in this study will now be presented.

#### **3.5.1 Sampling and selection of respondents**

The researcher will use the case study method for gathering data. Non-randomised purposive or judgmental sampling will be used as sampling method. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995) state that this sampling method is based on the judgement of a researcher regarding the characteristics of a representative sample. According to Leedy (1997), respondents are chosen because they are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon the researcher is studying.

Kruger (1988, p. 150) discusses five qualities of respondents who are pre-eminently suitable for participating in phenomenological research:

- ◆ Respondents who have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched.
- ◆ Those who are verbally fluent and able to communicate their feelings, thoughts and perceptions in relation to the researched phenomenon.
- ◆ Those who have the same home language as the researcher, since this will obviate the possible loss of subtle semantic nuances owing to the need to translate from one language to another.
- ◆ Respondents who express a willingness to be open to the researcher.

Intern psychologists who received training at different universities, but who did their internship in the same psychiatric training hospital will be included in the study. The sample group will vary in nature and composition, as their ages, race and genders will differ. Because of our multi-cultural South-African context, the respondents will all not have the same home language as the researcher, as Kruger (1988) recommends. The white respondents will be interviewed in their home language, whereas the black respondent will be interviewed in English.

### **3.5.2 Data collection**

The researcher will personally conduct informal, unstructured interviews with the research participants. The respondents will be asked to describe the experience of their internship year without interruption from the researcher. Respondents will also be asked to provide biographical information such as age and marital status. Audiotape recordings of the interviews will be transcribed.

The purpose of the qualitative research interview is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the respondents with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale, 1983). Precision in description and stringency in meaning interpretation in the qualitative interview correspond to exactness in quantitative measurements (Kvale, 1996).

### **3.5.3 Data analysis**

According to Barritt (1986), the task of the phenomenologist is to try to go to the heart of the matter by looking for themes that lie concealed in the unexamined events of everyday life, to find meaningful, shared themes in different people's descriptions of common experiences. Tesh (in Leedy, 1997) holds the view that phenomenological analysis of transcribed data is characterised as being initially more open, tentative and intuitive. The phenomenologist focuses on "meaning units", the smallest segments of text that are meaningful by themselves.

Tesch's approach (in De Vos, 1998, p. 343) will be used to analyse the data in this study:

- ◆ The researcher ought to get a sense of the whole by reading through all of the transcriptions carefully. He/she can then jot down some ideas as they come to mind.
- ◆ The researcher selects one interview, for example the most interesting, the shortest and goes through it asking, "What is this about?" and thinks about the underlying meaning in the information. He/she writes thoughts that come up in the margin.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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 organising scheme to see whether new categories and codes emerge.
- ◆ 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 interrelationships.
- ◆ The researcher makes a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetises the codes.
- ◆ The data material belonging to each category is assembled in one place and a preliminary analysis is performed.
- ◆ The researcher re-codes existing data if necessary.

### 3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Quantitative researchers document the worth of a project by assessing its reliability and validity (Poggenpoel, 1998). According to Krefting (in De Vos, 1998), this is much less common in qualitative research. Terms like *reliability* and *validity* do not fit the qualitative view (Agar in Krefting, 1991). In qualitative research, certain strategies can be employed to achieve trustworthiness and to increase the study's validity.

Krefting (1991) discusses Guba's (1981) model of trustworthiness of qualitative research. This model is based on four aspects of trustworthiness, namely truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality.

Each of these aspects of trustworthiness will subsequently be discussed.

#### 3.6.1 Truth-value

Lincoln and Guba (in Krefting, 1991) believe that truth-value is concerned with the confidence of the researcher in the truth of the findings based on the research design, informants and context. According to Sandelowski (in Krefting, 1991), truth-value is subject-oriented, not defined a priori by the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (in Krefting, 1991) term this as *credibility*. Sandelowski (in Krefting, 1991) suggests that a qualitative study is credible when it presents such accurate descriptions or interpretation of human experience that those who share the experience would immediately recognise the descriptions. The following strategies will be applied in this study to enhance truth-value:

##### ◆ Peer examination

The researcher will have continuous discussions with her supervisor. Lincoln and Guba (in Krefting, 1991) are of the opinion that this is one way of keeping the researcher honest and it may contribute to deeper reflexive analysis by the researcher.

◆ **Structural coherence**

The researcher will ensure that there are no unexplained inconsistencies between the data and their interpretation (Guba in Krefting, 1991). Credibility will be increased when the interpretation can explain the contradictions.

**3.6.2 Applicability**

Applicability can be defined as the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and settings or with other groups (Krefting, 1991). The ability to generalise or transfer results is of less relevance in this study. The purpose of the study is to describe a particular phenomenon or experience and not to generalise it to other contexts.

**3.6.3 Consistency**

Consistency can be defined in terms of *dependability* of findings. Consistency refers to whether the findings would be consistent if the inquiry were replicated with the same respondents or in a similar context (Krefting, 1991). Qualitative research emphasises the uniqueness of the human situation. Variation in experience rather than identical repetition is sought (Field & Morse in Krefting, 1991). The following strategies will be applied to check for consistency:

◆ **Dense descriptions**

The researcher will describe the exact methods of data gathering, analysis and interpretation in order to provide information as to how repeatable the study might be or how unique the situation (Kielhofner in Krefting, 1991).

◆ **Peer examination**

Peer examination as mentioned above also aids in creating consistency in interpretation. The researcher's supervisor will examine the research plan and implementation thereof.

### **3.6.4 Neutrality**

Neutrality refers to the freedom from bias in the research procedures and results (Sandelowski in Krefting, 1991). Guba (in Krefting, 1991) is of the opinion that neutrality refers to the degree to which the findings are a function solely of the informants and conditions of the research and not of other perspectives. The emphasis of the neutrality in qualitative research is shifted from the researcher to the data (Lincoln & Guba in Krefting, 1981).

Lincoln and Guba (in Krefting, 1981) suggest that *confirmability* be the criterion of neutrality that is achieved when truth-value and applicability are established. To ensure neutrality, the following strategies will be applied in this study:

#### **◆ Audit strategy**

Auditability suggests that another researcher could arrive at comparable conclusions given the same research context (Guba in Krefting, 1991). The researcher's supervisor will review the process of research, the product, findings, interpretations and recommendations (Lincoln & Guba in Krefting, 1991).

#### **◆ Reflexive analysis**

The researcher will become part of the research process and will assess and analyse the influence of her background and perception, as these will influence neutrality.

### **3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Neuman (1994) is of the opinion that ethics begins and ends with the researcher and that the researcher's personal moral code is the strongest defense against unethical behaviour. A discussion concerning ethical considerations in this study will now be presented.

### **3.7.1 Permission**

Permission to interview intern psychologists at the psychiatric hospital will be required from the hospital (See Appendix 1). Written permission will also be obtained from the respondents (See Appendix 2).

### **3.7.2 Anonymity and confidentiality**

Anonymity refers to the principle that the identity of an individual is kept secret (Mouton, 2001). Under no circumstances will the research data be discussed in the contexts of the name of the psychiatric hospital or the identity of the participants. All data gathered will be treated confidentially. No information will be released in a way that permits linking specific individuals to specific responses. Information will be publicly presented only in an aggregate form.

### **3.7.3 Informed consent**

Signed consent will be required from the respondents. The researcher will communicate the aims of the study to the participants. The participants will also be informed about steps that will be taken to keep responses anonymous, about any risks or discomfort, benefits, the researcher's and supervisor's names and the possibility of receiving a summary of the results. The researcher will inform the subjects about their freedom to opt out of the study at any stage.

### **3.7.4 Researcher integrity**

The researcher will be striving at all times during the investigation to maintain integrity. Mouton (2001, p. 240) believes that integrity implies the following:

- ◆ Adherence to the highest possible technical standards in research, teaching and practice.
- ◆ Since individual researchers vary in their research modes, skills and experience, they should always indicate the limits of their findings and the methodological constraints that determine the validity of such findings at the conclusion of a research study.

- ◆ In practice or other situations in which scientists are requested to render a professional or expert judgement, they should represent their areas and degrees of expertise accurately and justly.
  
- ◆ In presenting their work, scientists are obliged to always report their findings fully and not to misrepresent their results in any manner. To the best of their ability, researchers should also disclose details of their theories, methods and research designs that might be relevant to interpretations of research findings.

### **3.8 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter a discussion of the phenomenological theoretical framework was provided, followed by a definition of qualitative research. Thereafter, an overview of the research design was presented. The sampling procedure, method of data collection and method of data analysis were also discussed. This was followed by a description of aspects regarding trustworthiness of the research. Finally, the ethical considerations in this study were put forward.

In the following chapter, the themes extracted from the transcribed data will be presented. A discussion of the findings in relation to existing literature will conclude the chapter.