# CHAPTER 4

# METHOD

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the research design, the research participants, the method of data collection and the data analysis selected for the study will be discussed.

## 4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose behind the method used in this study is to work from a point where nothing is known about the participants, to a point of understanding the way they experience and cope with their lives. The aim of the study is to gain an understanding of how black women who are living with HIV, experience their lives and make it through life daily. It is important for the purpose of the study for the participants to give descriptions of those experiences in their own words. A qualitative research design was decided upon to gather those descriptions.

Qualitative research designs are investigative methods used to investigate the nature of social phenomena (Maso, 1994). The research design seeks to gain insight by discovering the meanings attached to a given phenomenon. According to Miles and Huberman (1984) qualitative research allows the researcher to focus on the experiences of the participants by means of language. The researcher analyses social settings, motives and meanings, actions and reactions, organisations, culture, individual's daily activities and negotiation of the roles within the context of everyday life (Rothe, 1993)

Creswell (1994) has proposed five underlying assumptions of qualitative research. The first assumption is that the focus is on process and not on product or outcome. Secondly, the interest is placed on meaning, that is, how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and how they structure their worlds. The third assumption is that the mode of enquiry may involve fieldwork, depending on the nature of the study, whereby the researcher

physically goes to people, settings, sites or institutions to observe and record the behaviour. Fourthly, the process, meaning and understanding are gained through words and pictures. Lastly, the inquiry is in such a way that a researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses and theories from details, thus making the inquiry inductive.

The qualitative research design looks at subjective meanings, descriptions, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of specific cases. According to Neuman (1997) the researchers attempt to capture aspects of the social world for which it is difficult to develop precise measures expressed as numbers. In case of the present study, the researcher had an opportunity to interact with the participants as humans, face to face, and the results were not expressed as just numbers.

According to Kvale (1996) qualitative research appears to be particularly relevant for studying the life worlds, lived realities and everyday practices of people in a particular setting. This study attempts to describe the 'life worlds' and everyday experiences of the women as they are. In this study, the qualitative design gave the researcher an opportunity to have direct contact with the women, to enter into their worlds, to listen and follow as they guided her along the journeys of their life experiences. At the end of the day, the researcher ends up attempting to view and understand reality as the participant views and understands it.

Sherman and Webb (cited in Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner & McCormack Steinmetz, 1991) analysed what leading qualitative researchers had to say about their work in various fields. Their analysis produced five similar characteristics of qualitative research:

- Events can be understood adequately only if they are seen in context. Therefore, a qualitative researcher immerses her/himself in the setting.
- The contexts of inquiry are not contrived; they are natural. Nothing is predefined or taken for granted

- Qualitative researchers want those who are studied to speak for themselves, to provide their perspective in which the persons studied teach the researcher about their lives.

- Qualitative researchers attend to the experience as a whole, not as separate variables.  The aim of qualitative research is to understand experience as unified.

- Since qualitative methods are tailored according to each specific research question and context, there is no one general method that can be used in all settings.

## 4.3 THE PARTICIPANTS

The study concentrated on the experiences of black women who were diagnosed with HIV and how they cope with their situation.  The literature study looked specifically at the concerns of women infected with HIV.   The literature  (see chapter 2) indicated that there is research being carried out on how the virus manifests in women as well as the success of prevention methods used by women.  Very little research, especially in South Africa, has concentrated on how women actually live their lives and cope, knowing they are HIV positive.  Based on this information, it was considered necessary to conduct the study.

## 4.3.1 RECRUITING OF PARTICIPANTS

The study was conducted at 1 Military hospital in Pretoria.  Some of the participants were referred to the researcher by the social worker and the nursing sister from the Infection Control clinic, which is now open everyday of the week.  The clinic renders services like family planning, treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, blood testing for HIV, pre- and post-test counselling for HIV, and medical checks and treatment for HIV infected people in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF).  The nursing sister referred some participants to the researcher from the Community Centre in Thaba-Tshwane.

While at the clinics, the social worker and the two nursing sisters informed the participants that a researcher would like to see them for an interview. Consent was obtained from the women to speak to the researcher. The women were seen thereafter. The researcher explained to each woman what she was intending to do and gave them time to think about whether they would like to participate in the study.

The number of the participants to be used in the study was not predetermined. It was decided to interview participants until the data becomes saturated and the information starts to repeat itself. Six participants were contacted initially, and they all called the researcher within the following three days to confirm that they were interested in partaking in the research. Subsequent appointments were made, during which the interviews took place. Four women turned up for the interviews, and the fifth woman fell ill before the date of the interview. The sixth woman never came for an appointment. The researcher thought that it was going to be difficult to get women who are HIV positive and would agree to talk about their experiences. To her surprise, all women who were contacted were more than willing to tell their stories for the purpose of this research.

All women were black South Africans. Their educational level ranged from standard eight to matric and none of them had any post matric or tertiary education. They were all working for the South African National Defence Force. All the subjects could speak English, although it was their second or third language. They were given a choice to use their first languages, which were Zulu, Tswana and South-Sotho. Two women chose to communicate in English while the other two alternated between Tswana and South-Sotho and English. All the participants were heterosexual. Detail regarding marital status, children and other biographical information will be provided in chapter 5.

## 4.3.2 CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The participants were chosen on the basis of certain inclusion criteria. These criteria included:

- The participants must be black women who have been diagnosed HIV-positive.
- They must have known of their diagnosis for at least six months to be able to know and describe their experiences and how they have been coping.
- They must be willing to participate in the study and share their experiences and articulate their feelings.
- They must be able to express themselves verbally.
- They must not be mentally retarded, psychotic, or be suffering from neurological disorders e.g. dementia.

All the participants in the study complied with the inclusion criteria above. More detailed background information about the participants will be given in section 5.2.

## 4.4 DATA COLLECTION

## 4.4.1 THE INTERVIEW

Since the interview method enables the researcher to study the data as it emerged and not according to pre-selected aspects, the decision was made to use it as a method of data collection (Lee, 1993). The interviews were used to gather descriptions of the experiences of women living with HIV.

An interview is defined as a purposeful conversation usually between two people (but sometimes involving more) that is directed by one in order to get information (Bogdan & Biklen cited in Ely et al., 1991). According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984, p.77) "by in-depth qualitative interviewing we mean repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and the informants directed towards understanding informants' perspectives on their lives,

experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words". This means that there is a specific form of interaction in which knowledge evolves through a dialogue (Kvale, 1996). The participants are requested to describe the topic being investigated in detail (Polkinghorne, 1989). As the researcher becomes aware of the meanings, questions are asked and clarifications are sought. An interview is therefore also seen as interwoven 'dances' of questions and answers in which the researcher follows as well as leads (Ely *et al*., 1991).

The following factors, as proposed by Rothe (1993), motivated the researcher to use interviews as a method of data collection:

- the participants are given the opportunity to express their feelings, knowledge, points of view and beliefs
- an opportunity is given to participants to express themselves in ways that they are unable to do on questionnaires
- room is created for expression of ideas and clarifications
- an opportunity is also created for on-sight verification of answers
- participants may provide insight in terms of how they construct answers and how that construction reflects certain ideologies or interests.

Although interviews can be a very useful method of data collection, Marshall and Rossman (1989) pointed out that they also have their limitations and weaknesses:

- since they must involve personal interaction, co-operation is essential
- participants may not be willing to share all the information with the interviewer
- the interviewer may not ask appropriate questions because of lack of expertise
- the answers to the questions may not be properly comprehended by the interviewer
- participants may not always be truthful

- when interviews are used alone, distortions in data are more likely due to the interviewer's personal biases
- although a lot of data can be obtained through interviewing, such data may be difficult to organise and interpret.

The rationale for the use of the interviews in this study is adequately summarised by Spradley (in Kvale, 1996, p.125) by the following:

*"I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel hem, to explain things as you explain them. Will you be my teacher and help me understand?"*

## 4.4.2 THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The researcher started by applying for permission to conduct the research project in the SANDF with its employees as participants. Permission was granted without any problems. During the first interview, background information was collected from the participants. The researcher met the participants in her office since it was impossible to meet them anywhere else. The researcher would have preferred to see the participants in their homes in order to get first hand information from the participants' own context. Another purpose of the initial interviews was to establish the relationship with the participants and make sure that they really understood the purpose of the study and what was needed from them.

Informed consent was obtained from the participants. It entailed informing them about the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the design, as well as of any possible risks and benefits from participation in the study. The consent further involved obtaining the voluntary participation of the subjects, with their right to withdraw from the study at any point, to avoid potential undue influence and coercion. Participants were then asked to sign a written consent, thus giving their permission to participate in the study.

At the end of the interviews, all the participants seemed relaxed in the researcher's company and were ready to begin telling their stories. One participant asked to start with the next stage of the interview immediately. The next appointments with the other three participants were scheduled for the week that followed.

The researcher decided to use an exploratory interview, which is open and has little structure. In this case the researcher introduced the topic or a problem to be uncovered, which was the way women who are infected with HIV experience their lives and how they cope with their situation. The researcher followed up on the subject's answers to obtain additional information about and new angles on the topic.

Taking into consideration the sensitivity of the topic, the participants were given freedom to express that which they were comfortable with expressing. An understanding was also reached that should any participant experience emotional distress during the interviews, the researcher would refer them for therapeutic support. That did not happen for the whole interview process. To allow the participants to volunteer descriptions and explanations, the researcher asked open-ended questions at the beginning and during the interview (True, 1989). Three open-ended questions were asked namely: (a) "how have you been experiencing your life since you were diagnosed HIV-positive?" (b) "how are you coping with your situation?" and (c) "how can you advise other women in the same situation as you?" All the interviews were audio-recorded and field notes were written during and after the interviews.

## 4.5  METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

According to Dey (1993) analysis involves breaking data down into bits, and then 'beating' the bits together. He further describes it as a process of resolving data into its constituent components, to reveal its characteristic elements and structure. After breaking down data and 'beating' it together, we sometimes end up with something quite different from what we started

with.  This makes sense since the aim of data analysis is not just to describe, but also to understand the objects and events to which our data refers.

Kvale (1996) is of the opinion that analysis and interpretation of data starts at the beginning of the research process, and not in the final phase of the process.  The interviews were transcribed and analysed according to the guidelines outlined by Kvale (1996) and Fiedeldey (1991).  The following steps were followed to complete the analysis of the categories of experience:

a.  *Familiarisation with data*

In order to familiarise herself with the information provided in the interviews, the researcher read through the transcripts several times.  As it is somehow impossible not to be influenced by one's own frame of reference, it is important to be as aware of one's own ideas as possible.  Bearing this in mind, the researcher read the transcripts with the purpose of identifying ideas that were unexpected or new to her.  The transcripts were put aside for a week and were then read again, with a view of identifying ideas that may have been missed during the first reading.

b.  *Developing the categories*

The next step was to determine the natural meaning units as expressed by the subjects.  This was done by focussing on the meaning of phrases, or of sentences grouped together.  Units were identified according to the way they were distinguished from each other on conceptual grounds (Pieterse, 1995).  They were then compared by looking at their similarities as well as their differences.  Subsequent to this, natural meaning units with similar content and meaning, were grouped together to form categories of experience.  This was done separately with every transcript.  The researcher then went through all the transcripts together in order to identify common as well as unique categories across the interviews.

## c. Establishing stability

To establish the intra-observer reliability or stability of the procedure, which will indicate the degree to which a procedure is constant over time, it was decided to start with the analysis of the first transcript. The categories of experience were identified, named and defined. A total of 22 experiential categories were identified. The procedure was repeated again after two weeks, and this time 20 conceptually different categories were identified. The uncertainty regarding the remaining two categories was discussed with a colleague and the decision was made to integrate them into two other already existing categories by extending their definitions. This left the number of categories at 20.

## d. Establishing consensus

The inter-coder reliability or consensus, which will indicate the degree to which a procedure can be repeated under different circumstances, was established using the first transcript as well. The transcript was analysed independently by a colleague with a Masters degree in Clinical Psychology. She used the same method of data analysis used by the researcher. She identified 18 categories, 17 of which were similar to those identified by the researcher. After discussing her findings with the researcher, they both decided to retain 3 categories initially identified by the researcher, plus one extra category identified by the colleague. This brought the total number of the categories to 21. Categories identified through the process described above were subsequently checked in the remaining three transcripts. Two more categories were identified from the remaining three transcripts, bringing the total number of categories to 23.

## e. Establishing credibility

The correspondence between meanings the participants attributed to the data they had given and the way in which the researcher portrayed it, indicates credibility of the research. One way of determining this is when the

researcher condenses and interprets the meaning of what the interviewee describes and 'sends' the meaning back (Kvale, 1996).  This was done during the interview to clarify some points and to ensure that the participants' descriptions were done justice to.  The researcher also went back to the participants a week after the categories were identified and described as indicated by Mertens and McLaughlin (1995), to give the participants an opportunity to correct, comment and confirm the results.  Every aspect of the study was discussed with the researcher's supervisor to ensure that challenging, disagreeing, and confronting of information takes place.  This also helped to ensure the credibility of the research process.

Credibility or trustworthiness of the whole research process is said to be embedded in the skills and sensitivity of the researcher and the way she uses herself as a knower and an enquirer in the study (Reason & Rowan, 1981). The value of trustworthiness in qualitative research is described by the following:

> *"I used to think trustworthiness was pervasive; but after reading Guba and Lincoln, I realise that it is more than pervasive.  It's so big that it's bigger than ethnographic study itself.  Not bigger in the sense of how much time it takes.  But bigger in the sense of how much it has to be thought about – before, during, and after the ethnographic study is done"* (Joan Giansante in Ely *et al.*, 1991, p.93).

f.  *Description of the categories*

After identifying and defining the categories, the next step was to describe them in more detail.  Each category was dealt with at a time, taking each woman's description into consideration and making verbatim references from the original transcripts.

*g. Interpretation of results*

The final step was to discuss the categories and integrate them with the literature and theoretical information provided in chapters 2 and 3.

## 4.6  CONCLUSION

A detailed account of the research method used for this study was discussed in this chapter.  The steps that were followed in the qualitative analysis of data were also provided in detail.   The following chapter deals with a presentation of the results.

ERRATA

Change the word "loose" to "lose" on the following pages

p. 10, line 22

p. 69, line 9

p. 71, line 28

p. 72, line 11

p. 74, line 12

p. 80, line 14 & 15

Change the word "loosing" to "losing" on

p. 17, line 11

p. 72, line 5, 6, 8

p. 80, line 10

p. 82, line 11

p. 11, line 19: "women are" should be "women were"

p. 12, line 21: "legions" should read "lesions"

p. 17, line 25: "reported against" should be "reported by"

p. 17, line 26: "occur" should be "occurs"

p. 25, line 27: "undimensional" should be "unidimensional"

p. 35, line 9: the word "her" should be inserted before "children"

p. 41, line 13: "a individual" should read "an individual"

p. 46, line 6: "a" should be inserted before "friend's"

p. 53, line 10: "hem" should be spelt "them"

p. 63, line 10: the word "a" should be inserted before "few"

p. 71, line 21: "concern and" should read "concern with, and"

p. 85, line 21: "live the way" should be living the way"

p.92, line 6/7: "Hate feelings" should be "Feelings of hate"

p. 96, line 25: "other people" should be "some people"

p. 101, line 7: "a" should be inserted before "daily"

p. 103, line 8: the word "the" should be inserted before "better"

p. 103, line 29: "by another should read "to another"