CHAPTER 3

METHOD

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The method used in this study, will be discussed in the following paragraphs with reference to the research design, sampling procedure, data collection and data analysis. Problems which are specific to research amongst adolescents, will also be discussed.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.2.1 The nature of qualitative research

A qualitative research method was used. This method provides freedom for discovery, to get a whole picture of a person's lived experiences. It is more personal and allows personal contact between the interviewer and interviewee. The qualitative research method yields an opportunity to establish rapport with the interviewee. Non-judgemental responsiveness by an interviewer are also regarded as an important aspect since it makes the subject feels accepted. No time limits are given to the interviewee and he or she is provided with an opportunity to respond in his or her own unique way, therefore there is no absolutely correct or incorrect response (Smith, 1996).

According to Neuman (1997) qualitative researchers emphasise the importance of the social context for understanding the social world. The meaning of social action or statements depends in an important way on the context in which it appears.

According to Ashworth, Giorgi and Koning (1986), an interviewee is likely to more readily divulge information if the interviewer is not an acquaintance. It is sometimes not easy for people to openly disclose information about themselves to a person known to them, fearing that the interviewer may look at them in a different way than before the interview. In this study, the fact that the interviewer was known to the interviewees, could have influenced the answers

they gave. However, the interviewer was careful in establishing good rapport and trust with the children, and ensured them of the confidentiality of the information they would give to her.

Even though qualitative research allows freedom of expression, it is sometimes advisable to use an interview schedule, to encourage flow and variety of pace. The respondents, when talking freely will, however, not adhere to the order of the schedule. They will cover topics before they are introduced and continually reintroduce those of importance to themselves. It is also important to rephrase questions to ensure the respondents understand what is required (Ashworth et al., 1986).

The following characteristics of qualitative research are outlined by (Ashworth et al., 1986):

(a) The individual case study

From a qualitatively point of view, intensive studies of individuals give the researcher a broad context of interpreting the meaning of an interviewee's psychological experiences. The researcher obtains a unique and penetrating knowledge of the relationship between the person's present life situation and his or her past history, and the role this plays in his or her behaviour, which may again provide a basis for understanding the more general conditions of human behaviour.

(b) Open mode of observation

Open observation implies that the researcher proceeds without a fixed design planned in advance, and allows the reality he/she encounters to determine the process. Such openness would enable the researcher to be less prejudiced in discovering the actual experiences of the participants in the study.

In the present study, an interview schedule was used, but in addition the researcher remained open for any additional information the children could perhaps give, and where necessary she deviated from the schedule.

(c) The interpretation of meaning

The interpretation of data is open to multiple meanings and different layers of a particular experience or behaviour. Qualitative research does not maintain a strict line of demarcation between data and meaning, between description and interpretation. The word multiple determination implies that the one and the same act may have multiple meanings and motives. The meaning of an act may be ambiguous and contradictory, and qualitative research entails a methodological tolerance of ambiguity in the interpretation of meaning.

(d) Historical dimension

The role accorded to the historical dimension of a person's life depends on the theoretical perspective of the researcher. Psychoanalysis, for example, formalises and tests interpretations about the meaning of human actions, in terms of a person's life history and its continued temporal unfolding.

(e) Human relationship

The personal relationship between the researcher and the subjects involves layers of disclosure, the subject disclosing different layers of his personality according to his involvement in the personal relationship with the researcher. There may be a continuum of layers of interaction, yielding different depths of knowledge. There are the superficial formal contacts of everyday life, and there may be intensive and enduring emotional relationships.

The purpose of this study was to describe life experiences of black rural adolescence in the absence of their fathers. Therefore it is descriptive study. According to Robson (1993) and Wagenaar (1992) a descriptive study aims at portraying an accurate profile of a person, events or situation.

Neuman (1997) mentions the following as the goals of descriptive research:

(a)   To provide an accurate profile of individuals or a group.

(b)   To describe a process, mechanisms, or relationships.

(c)   To gives a verbal or numerical picture of the phenomenon observed.

(d)   To find information to stimulate new explanations.

(e)   To present background information of a context.

(f)   To create a set of categories or to classify types.

(g)   To document information that contrasts with prior beliefs about the subject.

3.2.2 Criticism against the qualitative research method

Qualitative research reveals only the information that the interviewee wishes to reveal, thus no guarantee exists that the person with whom the interview is being conducted, is telling the truth. One interviewer's interpretation of what the interviewee relates, can also differ from that of the next interviewer (Louw & Edwards, 1993). However, the experiences of the interviewee must be accepted as it is narrated from his or her point of view, which need not be to be the truth for someone else (Spradley, in Kvale, 1996). Failure to establish good rapport may result in invalid information, or perhaps even conflict between the interviewer and the interviewee (Smith, 1996).

3.3   THE PARTICIPANTS

3.3.1 Identification and recruitment of the participants

The participants were recruited from one high school in a rural village in the Northern Province. They comprised ten adolescents, five boys and five girls who are fatherless due to divorce, separation, desertion, unwed childbirth or teenage pregnancy.

The method used for selection of the participants was purposive sampling. In the latter, the researcher uses his/her own judgement, depending on the topic, about which respondents to choose, and picks only those who best meet the purpose of the study. The advantage of

purposive sampling is that the researcher can use his/her research skill and prior knowledge to choose participants (Bailey, 1994).

The participants' ages ranged from 15 to 20 years and they were thus in middle and late adolescence.

The inclusion criteria for selecting participants were:

(e)   They had to be in middle or late adolescence.

(f)   They had to reside permanently in a rural village.

(g)   The child's father had to be absent from the family, due to divorce, separation, desertion, unwed childbirth and teenage pregnancy; this excluded instances where a father had died. Father absence was determined by asking the child the following questions: Do you have a father? Where is he? Do you know him?

(h)   The participants had to be willing and able to articulate the information needed.

(i)   An equal number of boys and girls were selected.

3.3.2 Procedure

All matters regarding consent to conduct the study was obtained through the office of the principal of the school where the participants were recruited. The children were introduced to the nature of the research, and asked to participate, but they were also told that they could withdraw if they wanted to. Heller (1984) says that since participants have the option either to refuse to take part in a study, or to co-operate with the researcher, the researcher must come to an explicit agreement with the participants concerning their participation in the study.

In instances where emotional problems surfaced in the course of data collection, or when the participants expected that the researcher would assist them to come in contact with their fathers, the children were referred to the appropriate professional services available in the community, which mostly involved social workers.

3.3.3 Problems in studying adolescents

Lloyd (1985) stated the following problems when conducting research amongst adolescents: Firstly, due to individual differences, there is disparity between chronological, physical and psychological development during adolescence. Consequently, research groups consisting of subjects of the same chronological age often produce widespread differences among themselves and this may confound the results.

The second problem concerns the validity of adolescent subjects' responses obtained in research. There are several factors that combine to make this a more serious issue in adolescent research. For instance, adolescents are at a self-conscious age. When questions of a personal or intimate nature are asked, individuals may adjust their answers, often unwittingly, in a direction they feel will make them appear in a positive light.

A third problem is the fact that adolescent attitudes and beliefs are undergoing self-examination and may change relatively rapidly. For example, an adolescent may not really know how he feels about religion at the time such a question is asked in a research study.

3.4 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The following techniques have used during data collection.

(a)   A personal interview

(b)   Draw-a-Person Test (DAP)

(c)   Kinetic Family Drawing (KFD)

These three methods of data collection will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

3.4.1 Personal Interviews

3.4.1.1   The nature of the interviews

Language as a tool for communication played a central role in obtaining data for this study. According to Wagenaar (1992), language plays an important role at every stage of scientific

endeavour. In modern contructivist treatments, language is not merely a vehicle for talking about science, it is the way we do science. Indeed, it is through language that we construct the world and language is not only used to display the world. Language provides us with a tool for linking what we think with what we can see and touch.

According to Moore (in Muir, 2000) language, whether verbal or non-verbal, is a prerequisite for assignment of meaning. This occurs via internal and external dialogue through discussion with other people. Language can thus be used to make concealed meanings explicit, yet also to hide certain meanings (Venter, in Muir, 2000).

An interview schedule was constructed on the basis of the literature review, the theoretical orientation on which the study was based, and the researcher's personal experience. It covered the following themes:

(a)   Economic status of the family.
(b)   The adolescent's social interaction.
(c)   Whether the mother had any boyfriends.
(d)   General problems in the family.
(e)   Perception of self.
(f)   Views about a good family composition.
(g)   Views about marriage.
(h)   How they rated themselves in terms of academic achievement.
(i)   Views about education.
(j)   Future expectations.
(k)   What they thought were the reasons for their fathers' absence.
(l)   The child's feelings about father absence.
(m)   Perceptions about other children who live with their fathers.
(n)   Problems and benefits with regard to father absence and support from other people.

All the interviews were conducted in North-Sotho and subsequently translated by the researcher.

The interviews were conducted over three days in a room that was made available to the researcher. A tape recorder was used during the interviews and the participants were asked

permission to record the information they provided. They were also assured that personal detail would be treated as confidential. The use of a tape recorder facilitated the process of interviewing, in that it allowed good eye conduct between the researcher and the participants, observation of non-verbal communication and rapid flow of information.

In addition, brief field notes were also made during the interview, and elaborated upon directly after the interview. This came in handy, because in three of the interviews the tape recorder did not function properly, and in addition some of the children spoke very softly. It must thus be remembered that in three instances verbatim transcriptions of the interviews were not available.

Some participants were not talkative by nature and did not easily share information. The use of the drawing techniques helped to establish rapport with them. The administration of the DAP and KFD included asking questions about the drawings, and this provided information about the children themselves and the family environment. The impression was gained that these children found it easier to respond to the drawings, rather than to a direct interview.

3.4.1.2   Analysis of interview data

Data were firstly transcribed from the tape recordings to written information in harmony with the specific mode of expression (e.g., pauses, repetitions). Then the information was structured in the form of a narrative story. The "narrative creator" approach was used. It requires to look at the responses of the participants to form a coherent and understandable story (Kvale, 1996).

The analytic comparative method of data analysis was used in this study. According to Neuman (1997), the researcher develops ideas about regularities or patterns in relations, either from pre-existing theories or through induction. The researcher then focuses on a few regularities and makes contrasts with alternative explanations, and looks for regularities that are not limited to a specific setting (time, place, or group). He is not seeking universal laws, only regularities within a social context.

Neuman (1997) describes the following method of analytic comparison:

(a) Method of agreement

The researcher focuses on what is common across cases. He establishes the cases that have a common outcome, then tries to locate a common cause, although other features of cases may differ. The method proceeds by a process of elimination. He eliminates features as possible causes if they are not shared across cases that have a common outcome. For instance, a researcher may look at four cases, which share two common features, but they also differ in many respects. He then looks for one or two or more common causes to explain the common outcome in all cases.

(b) Method of difference

This method can be used together with the method of agreement. A researcher first locates cases that are similar in many respects but differ in a few crucial ways. He pinpoints features whereby one set of cases is similar with regard to, for example, outcomes and causal features, and another set which differs on outcomes and causal features. The method of differences reinforces information from positive cases. Thus a researcher looks for cases that share many features, but lack some key features and have a different outcome.

According to Neuman (1997), a qualitative researcher forms new concepts that are grounded in the data. Concept formation is an integral part of data analysis and begins during data collection. Thus conceptualisation is the way that a qualitative researcher organises and makes sense of data.

A qualitative researcher analyses data by organising it into categories on the basis of themes, concepts or similar features. The researcher may develop new concepts, and formulate conceptual definitions. The relationships among concepts are examined, and eventually the concepts are linked to each other in terms of a sequence, or sets of similar categories that the researcher interweaves into theoretical statements (Neuman, 1997).

Data need to be coded to reduce it into manageable groups. Neuman (1997) mentions the following types of coding:

(a) Open coding

This is performed when going through recently collected data. The researcher locates themes and assigns initial codes or labels in a first attempt to condense the mass of data into categories. The researcher is open to create new themes and changes the initial codes (or labels) in subsequent analyses. He brings the themes to the surface from deep inside the data. In this study, the questions asked were based on the literature and thus the theory influenced the themes that were identified.

(b) Axial coding

The researcher now focuses on the initial codes or preliminary concepts, more than on the original data. Additional codes or new ideas may develop and must be noted. The researcher moves towards organising the ideas or themes and identifies the axis of the key concepts in analysis. In axial coding, the researcher looks for categories or concepts that cluster together, i.e., combining several closely related concepts into one, which is of a more general nature, dividing existing concepts into subcategories. This coding stimulates thinking about the linkage between the themes and raises new question.

(c) Selective coding

This involves scanning data and previous codes. The researcher looks selectively for cases that illustrate themes and make comparisons and contrasts after most or all data collection is completed. An example of this is whether gender is related to particular themes.

In the present study, where applicable, themes from the projective techniques were integrated with the themes from the interview. However, the projective techniques also provided additional information not mentioned during the interviews.

3.4.2 Projective techniques

According to Machover (1949) and Klepsch and Logie (1982), projective methods of exploring motivations have repeatedly uncovered deep and perhaps unconscious aspects of self-expression, which could not be made manifest in direct communication. It is safe to assume that all creative activity bears the specific stamp of the individual characteristics of the individual who is creating.

3.4.2.1   Draw-a-Person Test (DAP)

Machover (1949) and Klepsch and Logie (1982) pointed out that drawing may be a projection of the self-concept, of attitudes towards someone else in the environment, or of the ideal self image. It may also be a result of external circumstances, an expression of emotional tone and an expression of the subject's attitude towards life and society in general.

(a) Administration

The DAP is an individual test. Each participant was provided with an A4 blank sheet of paper and soft pencil. An eraser was not provided. Then the researcher instructed the participant to draw a person, followed by the person of the opposite sex. The participants were told that the researcher is not interested in their drawing ability, as long as they draw a person. Questions by the participants were answered in a non-directive manner.

The following inquiries were made about the pictures:
Who is this person?
How is he/she?
Is he/she married?
With whom does he live?
Does he prefer his/her mother or father?
Does he/she have brothers or sisters?
Is he/she working and what type of work is he/she doing?
What is his/her ambition?

How smart is he/she?

How strong is he/she?

How good looking is he/she?

What is generally on his/her mind?

What fears does he/she have?

What is he/she sad about?

What makes him/her angry?

Does he/she prefer to be alone or with other people?

What do other people say about him/her?

Whom does he/she remind you?

Is there anything you want to add about the person?

The participants were very co-operative, and no problems were experienced by the researcher except that the administration of the DAP was time consuming. The above mentioned inquiry helped the researcher to get a clearer picture of the participants' psychological experiences. Some participants drew members of their families, and this helped the researcher to get information about family relationships. Some of the information gathered during the administration of the in DAP was later elaborated upon during the interview.

(b) Analysis

The pictures were analysed by taking the following features into consideration: the parts of the body that were drawn, clothing, facial expression and the postural tone of the figure. The positions of pictures on the paper, the size, slant, shading, transparencies, omissions, distortions and were also considered during analysis (Burns, 1990).

For instance, the placement of a picture at the right side of the page could indicate stability and controlled behaviour, and the ability to delay satisfaction of needs and drives. Gross distortions and omissions may indicate poor reality contact or a mood disturbance, while moderate distortions may indicate conflicts. Transparency in the drawings could suggest poor judgement, anxiety/conflict, or sexual disturbances. With regard to body parts, a big head may indicate intellectual aspirations or it may indicate aggressive tendencies, while a small head

66

may indicate feelings of intellectual inadequacy (Koppitz 1968; Machover, 1949; Newmark, 1985).

2.4.2.2   Kinetic family drawing (KFD)

Hulse (in Klepsch & Logie, 1982) stated that the family drawing can be used in normal children to examine important aspects of family dynamics. Koppitz (1968) believed that children's drawings of their families reflect their unconscious attitudes, including negative attitudes, towards their families.

(a) Administration

The KFD is also an individual test. Each participant was provided with blank A4 paper and a soft pencil. They were instructed to draw a picture of everyone in their family including themselves doing something. They were asked to draw the whole person, not cartoon or stick pictures. They were also asked to mention the names of the people they drew, the objects drawn and what the people were doing (Klepsch & Logie, 1982).

(b) Analysis

The analysis of KFD was based on the actions or movements of the people, rather than on inert figures. Styles such as compartmentalisation or underlining of the pictures were considered suggestive of an unstable home environment. Actions portraying the family members fulfilling conventional gender roles, such as the mother cooking and the father reading newspaper, were considered positive indicators of good family functioning (Klepsch & Logie, 1982).

Actions which portrayed the family members being more concerned about objects than other people, such as the mother cleaning or ironing and the father going to work or working outside, were considered negative indicators (Burns & Kaufman, 1970; Klepsch, & Logie 1986).

Di Leo (in Klepsch & Logie, 1982) considered the following to be significant in the family drawings: omission of a member of the family, omission of self, parental figure the child placed

himself closest to, similarity in style of clothing to another member, role in the family interaction and isolation.

3.5   PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was conducted with two participants known to the researcher. The parents of the participants were firstly asked permission. It was aimed to check the feasibility of the study, including the researcher's social interactive skills, efficiency of the data collection methods, assessing sources of bias and refining the method of data analysis (Edwards, Miles & Huberman, in Segoati, 1997). Based on the pilot study, the researcher modified her approach where necessary.

The pilot study was done to two participants. The first one was a fourteen-year-old boy, who was in early adolescence. The researcher then decided to interview a second child, a girl, who met the requirement for being either in middle or late adolescence. The data from both interviewees was analysed to test the method of data analysis.

3.6   INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The results were interpreted on the basis of the literature review, theoretical background and the social context of the participants. The method of analytic generalisation was used, which means that a reasoned judgement is used as a guide to what might occur in another situation (Kvale, 1996).

3.7   CREDIBILITY AND STABILITY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

In this study, the credibility and stability of the data were enhanced in different ways:

a.   To increase the likelihood that stable and credible knowledge would be gained, the researcher was careful to establish good relationships with the participants. The purpose of the study was explained to them, their co-operation was requested, and they were assured of the confidentiality of personal details. Efforts were made to establish a

relationship of trust in which they could express their true feelings without fear of disapproval from the interviewer.

b. The researcher took the context in which the participants lived into account in the interpretation of the data. This included the characteristics of life in a rural village, and relevant cultural beliefs, values and norms, as described in Chapter 2.

c. Different methods of data collection were used, namely a personal interview, the DAP and KFD. To the extent that the information obtained from these different methods converged and supplemented or confirmed each other, the credibility of the data was improved (Reason & Rowan, 1981).

d. Stability refers to the extent to which data becomes constant over time. In the present study, this was accounted for by repeatedly going through the data and identifying themes (i.e., codes or labels) and categories. These themes (codes or labels) and categories were revised, until no new themes or groupings of themes into categories could be differentiated. Going round the cycle of data analysis several times helped to enhance the stability of the results. The transcriptions of the interviews were read a number of times, and concepts were checked and rechecked so that the themes and categories could progressively be refined, differentiated from one another, and integrated, to reach a theoretical saturation point (Dlukulu, 2000).

e. Credibility involves a correspondence between the way in which participants perceive certain issues, and the way in which the researcher portrays their viewpoints (Dlukulu, 2000). In this regard, the researcher's supervisor repeatedly challenged the researcher's views in an effort to promote an accurate reflection as possible of the meanings intended by the participants.

f. Interviews were conducted individually with participants, and the commonalties in their narratives provided evidence of intersubjective knowledge. At the same time, individual experiences were also recognised and retained.

g. Since all the interviews were conducted in the home language of the participants, they could express their experiences comfortably and this could have enhanced the credibility of the results.

h. A pilot study was conducted with the view to refine the method of data collection, analysis and interpretation.

3.8 CONCLUSION

A qualitative research method was used, including the use of personal interviews and two projective techniques. Ten adolescents were recruited from a high school in a rural area in the Northern Province. A pilot study was conducted to pretest the various stages of the research process.