

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

According to De Gruchy (1995) approximately 77% of the total South African population regard themselves as members of many Christian denominations, with blacks comprising the vast majority of church membership. It is clear that Christian religion has a significant part in the lives of the South Africans.

This study explores the Pentecostal pastors' understanding of the psychological distress. What was of significance is the mental health care role that the black Pentecostal pastors play in the church and community. McRay, McMinn, Wrightman, Burnett and Ho (2001) assert that the central work of pastors throughout Christian history has been their attention of the 'ministry of the soul' by addressing the psychological and emotional needs of people.

1.2 Aims of the study

We have a problem of relevance of modern Western developed psychology in the South African context. According to Swartz and Gibson (2001), research practices in general and social science research in particular are intricately linked to the dominant western ideologies. However, these ideologies are unable to understand or account for people's needs in the apparently unique South African political post-apartheid context. It is therefore necessary to conduct researches that are relevant to the context and circumstances of South Africans.

Secondly, the African Christian churches has historically, played an important role in addressing many political and social issues including the mental health problems of the black community. They are attending to the needs of the

victims of the previous system, redressing past neglects, and attending to new concerns and crises, in our country's current process of restitution, nation building, reconciliation and reconstruction.

It is also shocking that there is a shortage of research of the black Christian churches and their community mental health care involvement. Thus the researcher decided to conduct an exploratory study of how Pentecostal pastors describe and explain psychological distress, especially since they are confronted with many demands including mental health problems. Finding out how Pentecostal pastors view psychological distress will provide information about the church congregation view and experience of the phenomenon.

The researcher is further influenced by the aim of Community psychology, which is to understand and explain human behaviour in the social world, where it occurs instead of in hospitals or clinics (Duffy & Wong, 1996).

For psychologists to gain knowledge in developing meaningful skills to ensure that they respond more effectively to the needs of religious clients, they need to understand the worldviews of Pentecostal pastors.

According to Wulff in Shafranske (1996), religion is one of the human preoccupations that profoundly challenge psychologists. It is therefore, imperative for psychologists whether or not they profess to be religious to take religion into account if they are to understand and help their fellow human beings.

1.3 Nature of study

This research study is exploratory in nature largely because there is a very limited research done on this field. As a result of the chosen method of study, the researcher used tools that would lead to openness and flexibility as well as allowing unexpected experiences to be addressed. The inductive method will

be used for this study, which will allow for a detailed observation of the world and move towards more abstract generalizations and ideas.

A qualitative approach, known as Grounded theory will be used. This approach is highly systematic; it assists with the collection and analysis of qualitative data for the purpose of generating explanatory assumptions that furthers the understanding of social and psychological phenomena (Charmaz, 1995).

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with five Pentecostal pastors. Interview data was transcribed and analysed using the Grounded theory analytic techniques.

The findings indicated that indeed the pastors are pivotal in the community and even in their churches. They described psychological distress as a disturbance that occurs due to stressors, and affecting the behaviour, mood, cognitive functioning and spiritual well being. The changes results in impaired interpersonal, social and occupational functioning.

1.4 Outline of the contents

The next two chapters will focus on a theoretical overview, chapter two will introduce the reader to an understanding of the concept of psychological distress with various theories and definitions other researchers produced. Chapter three will explore the researcher's reasons for choosing Pentecostal pastors as research participants. Chapter four explains the research method and the procedure that will be followed in conducting this study, it answers questions such as why the researcher chose the methodology? How the research will be conducted? And how will validity and reliability be achieved? The chapter will describe step by step how the research process will evolve. Chapter five will give a detailed description of the research findings. The final chapter will give an integrated discussion of findings, practical implications, limitations of the study and recommendations.