

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The research methodology used in this study is outlined and discussed in this chapter. This is done to substantiate the choice of the research method, the data collection process and the implemented data analysis.

The methodology used in this study was qualitative, with an interpretive, naturalistic approach being followed. As cognitive theory typically uses quantitative research designs, a section that attempts to reconcile the theoretical framework with the methodology follows the description of qualitative research.

Data were collected in different ways and forms. These involved interviews (structured and semi-structured), Participant observation and consultation with the elders of the community under study. The tape-recorded data collected from the interviews were transcribed into electronic format. Data were analysed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) method of data reduction, data display, conclusion and verification.

Ethical considerations such as the protection of the Participants' interest and well-being, their emotional safety and identity were deemed important. A discussion of how the integrity and consistency of the data analysis and interpretation were established concludes the chapter. Qualitative research, as used in this study, is discussed in the following sections.

3.2 DESIGN

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state that qualitative research uses a number of methods "as it involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (p. 2). The choice of a qualitative research design in this study was based on the need to acquire in-depth understanding of relatively unexplored phenomena that are value-laden, and to situate the findings within an integrated theoretical perspective.

3.2.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is characterised by an attempt to understand the meanings that people give to social phenomena. As one cannot understand human behaviour without understanding the framework within which the Participants interpret their thoughts, feelings and actions (Marshall & Rossman, 1980), qualitative researchers enter into the natural settings of the Participants whom they study. They physically go to the people, interview setting or site, to observe or record behaviour in its sociocultural context. This they do as human behaviour is significantly influenced by the sociocultural and the interview settings in which it occurs. As such, researchers are able to study behaviour to gain an understanding of norms, traditions, roles and values, which are crucial for contextual variables (Cresswell, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1980).

The objective is to look for answers to questions about the way the Participants create and interpret social experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). For example, when the researcher conducts interviews with the Participants, the researcher obtains an idea of how the Participants feel and think about their situation, what sort of limitations they experience, how they deal with conflicts within themselves

and their environment, the rules they have to deal with, their strengths and weaknesses.

The researchers use themselves as the primary instrument for data collection and would, for example, conduct face-to-face interviews with their Participants with the objective of looking for answers to questions about the way social experience is created and interpreted (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). According to Merriam (1988), the meaning that qualitative researchers are interested in revolves around how people make sense of their lives, experiences and the structures of the world. This is explored through fieldwork that focuses on processes and finds meanings of events situated in the sociocultural natural setting of the Participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1980). This setting includes the past experiences and personalities of the researcher (Peck & Secker, 1999). The fact that qualitative researchers' ultimate objective is to understand the meanings that people give to social phenomena makes qualitative research descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning and understanding gained through words. In achieving this, the research process becomes inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts and theories from details (Creswell, 1994), in an attempt to observe and interpret meanings in context (Patton, 1990).

This study was conceptualised, designed and conducted by the researcher who used her as an instrument and is also a member of the culture under study (Creswell, 1994). The research focused on the context, perspective, experience and meaning of the Participants with the objective of describing and understanding the subject matter. A naturalistic and emergent design was applied. A naturalistic design is one that views reality as multiple, constructed, holistic and understood within its context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In an emergent design, the researcher seeks to observe and interpret meanings in context (Patton, 1990).

Qualitative research therefore involves interpreting non-numerical data in a particular perspective and context. It stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, the relationship between the researcher and the subject matter, the situational constraints and the value-laden nature of inquiry. Both the research and the researchers look for answers to questions about the way social experience is created and interpreted with a set of interpretive practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This is based on the understanding that different people from different groups have different contexts and perspectives, creating many different meanings in the world, where no one meaning is necessarily more valid than the other (Gay & Airasian, 1999).

In summary, qualitative research relies on first-hand accounts and tries to describe what it sees in rich detail (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). It stresses the socially constructed nature of reality by taking into account individual uniqueness where each person is an individual with a different perspective of the world, with different reactions to occurrences, and different opinions on how the world should be (Putney & Green, 1999).

The ontology is a categorisation of all the concepts in some field of knowledge, including the objects and all of the properties, relations, and functions needed to define the objects and specify their actions. It specifies the nature of reality that is to be studied, and what can be known about it. The researcher who uses an interpretive qualitative approach holds the ontological belief that the reality to be studied consists of people's subjective experiences of the external world (Thorne, Reimer Kirkham & O'Flynn-Magee, 2004). It also assumes that people's subjective experiences are real and as such, should be taken seriously (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). This study aimed to understand the subjective experiences of loss and bereavement among Black South African women in transitional societies.

Epistemology refers to the assumptions about knowledge and how it can be obtained (Myers, 2009). It studies the nature of knowledge, in particular its foundations, scope and validity, specifying the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known. It assumes that people can understand others' experiences by interacting with them and listening to what they tell us while adopting an epistemological stance towards reality (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Researchers who use an interpretive approach uses methodologies that rely on a subjective relationship between themselves and the Participants, for example, interviews and Participant observation, with the objective of explaining the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind social action (Terre Blanche et al., 2006; Thorne et al., 2004). This is done to specify how the researchers may go about practically studying whatever they believe can be known, as qualitative research techniques are assumed to be best suited to this task (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

3.2.2 Advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative research

The advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative research in this study are included here, and are relevant to the reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the study in chapter 5.

3.2.2.1 Advantages

Putney and Green (1999) identify the following advantages of qualitative research:

- It expands the range of knowledge and understanding beyond the researchers themselves.
- It provides ways of a) transcribing and analysing the discursive construction of everyday events, b) examining the nature of the subject

matter within and across events, c) exploring the historical nature of life within a social group or setting.

- It provides insight into the Participants' way of life so that the researcher can behave appropriately without offending the Participants.
- It provides information about why and how miscommunication occurs between people, especially when people are members of different groups.
- The approaches and theories that guide qualitative researchers raise awareness of different voices; and awareness of the need to consider whose voice will be represented, how, in what ways, and for what purposes.

3.2.2.2 Disadvantages

- The research may be costly because it is a time-consuming exercise in relation to the data collection, and because the process of analysis involves continual movement between the data and emerging themes to adapt. This includes the verification of the analytical framework being developed.
- The conclusions are typically disseminated through academic publications and papers, which people unfamiliar with the academic repertoire can find difficult to access and follow.
- Researchers have their own experiences and views and it is therefore important for them to be aware of these when carrying out inductive reasoning processes.
- Data is collected from a few cases or individuals and as such, findings cannot be generalised to the larger population.



- The quality of the research is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher.
- Rigour is more difficult than quantitative research to maintain, assess and demonstrate.
- It is not as well understood as quantitative research and is therefore more difficult to convince others of the importance of its contribution.

Cognitive theory was chosen amongst other psychological theories as the most appropriate to theoretically explain the collected data. The fact that it studies the mental processes underlying mental activity i.e. perception, learning, problem solving, reasoning, thinking, memory, attention, language and emotions motivated its choice amongst all other theories and approaches. Its focus on an individual's thoughts, and the belief that these thoughts determine one's emotions and behaviour and as such strengthened its choice. Also, people cannot have emotions and behaviours without thoughts as thoughts come before any feelings and actions, even though behaviour can at times be learned. On the basis of this argument, how one thinks can determine how situations are perceived and, changing feelings and behaviours can only change if thoughts are changed (Bowlby, 1997).

In the following paragraphs I attempt to reconcile the qualitative research design with cognitive theory.

3.3 RECONCILIATION OF THE QUALITATIVE DESIGN WITH A COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, the theoretical framework relied on cognitive psychology and theory that was developed through positivistic science (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As research is about creating new social realities, what researchers seek to describe

is the social world. This world consists of factual statements, knowledge claims, and moral judgements that refer to an empirical reality while simultaneously setting up the conditions through which the reality can be known (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This makes the background knowledge or paradigms of the subject matter important to tell us what exists, how to understand it, and most importantly, how to study it (Bryman, 2006a).

According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006), paradigms are all-encompassing systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions for researchers, namely, ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Their function is to help determine the questions that the researchers ask about constructs and how they go about answering them (Bryman, 2006b). When epistemology specifies the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known, methodology specifies how researchers may practically go about studying whatever they believe can be known (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). These dimensions of paradigm exist simultaneously and constrain each other at the same time (Bryman, 2006a).

As I became familiar with the research topic, I decided on a theoretical framework that would enable me to gain an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Bryman & Cassell, 2006). Although Lincoln and Guba (1985) perceive qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches as incompatible based on the underlying philosophical nature of each paradigm (Bryman, 2006a), others believe that the skilled researcher can successfully combine approaches (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) based on the apparent compatibility of the various research methods (Bryman, 2006b).

The positivistic approach has influenced psychology with linear cause and effect models using quantitative designs. In this study a design that is circular in nature

is used that creates tension between the ontology, epistemology and (qualitative) methodology that is used. In the following paragraphs I attempt to reconcile the qualitative research design with cognitive theory (Bryman, 2006b).

A quantitative approach assumes social facts with an objective reality, primacy of method, and variables that can be identified and relationships that can be measured, and has an outward point of view (Bryman, Becker & Sempik, 2007). Conversely, a qualitative approach assumes a socially constructed reality, primacy of subject matter, with complex, interwoven and difficult variables to measure (Bryman et al., 2007). While a quantitative approach aims at generalisability, prediction and causal explanations, a qualitative approach aims at contextualisation, interpretation and understanding the Participants' perspectives (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

A quantitative approach begins with hypotheses and theories, manipulation and control, and uses formal instruments and experiments (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). It also uses deductive and component analysis in an attempt to reduce data to numerical indices, and uses abstract language in writing up results (Bryman, 2006b). Qualitative approaches might, however, end with hypotheses and grounded theory, with emergence and portrayal. Researchers use themselves as an instrument (Bryman, 2006b). The approach is naturalistic and inductive in search of patterns, and might describe what the person feels, reminiscing about experiences relating to the feeling, and embracing pluralism and complexity with descriptive write-up, and makes minor use of numerical indices (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

In contrast, researchers interested in what allows people to perceive apply cognitive theory to understand the life-world. This, according to Roth (2004), emphasises two complementary parts to the cognitive phenomenological

(qualitative) method in overcoming the subjective/objective divide. They involve the articulation of the structures that characterise the life-world which include objects and events, patterns of behaviour, and changes in those objects, events and behaviour (Agre & Horswill, 1997).

However, Scott (2007) argues that qualitative and quantitative research designs are irreconcilable. The argument is based on the idea that approaches and ways of reconciling quantitative and qualitative methods are still deficient in relation to the development of an overarching and correct view of ontological and epistemological matters; and concludes that reconciliation occurs at the ontological level. The suggestion was that positivist and interpretive ontologies underlie quantitative and qualitative methods respectively, and represent different ways of approaching real phenomena that are not predicated on them.

According to Lincoln and Guba (2000), “naïve realism” underlies positivism, which holds that reality is both “real” and “apprehendable”. Interpretive ontology assumes that it is impossible to separate the researcher from the researched (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). It also assumes that the researcher and the researched are interlocked in an interactive process in which each influences the other (Mertens & McLaughlin, 1995). Based on this understanding, the qualitative research design aims to elicit rich experiential data about the phenomenon within the everyday context in which it is negotiated and made meaningful (Bryman, 2006b). According to Thorne et al. (2004), relativism underlies interpretivism with the belief that knowledge is relative to the observer while reality is determined by the experiences, social background and other factors of the observer, which become the raw data. These factors are not a constant, but represent rather a relationship between changing variables. This, together with cognitive phenomenology, constitutes real life experience as a proper field of phenomena that cannot be reduced to other approaches but require a rigorous method and pragmatics of inquiry, i.e. exploration and analysis. This is so as cognitive

phenomenology seeks mutual constraints between the phenomenal field as revealed by the researcher's experience and careful life-world analysis, and the associated field of phenomena as studied by cognitive science (Roth, 2004).

Researchers who use a positivist approach believe that their subject matter consists of a stable and unchanging external reality. As such, they tend to adopt an objective and detached epistemological stance towards how reality can be known. At face value, this means that the observer is separate from the observed, and that findings are "true" (Bryman, 2006b). Durant and Cashman (2003) confirm this view by arguing that the social order exists independently of social scientific inquiry, suggesting therefore that reality exists independently of a particular community. However, Roth (2004) argues that qualitative research assumes that the study of a particular experience leads to the recognition of generative structures that are common to people more generally. He continues to see qualitative research as an attempt to establish a scientific method that explicitly deals with experience and structures that give rise to it and as such deal with the hard problem of cognitive science to relate personal experience and mental/cognitive events. The implication is that, even when individuals and communities may construct interpretations of events that reflect relative values and interests, the underlying phenomena do not rely on them for existence (Bryman, 2006b).

A comparison of the beliefs and assumptions of the two approaches suggests that while the quantitative nature of reality is single, tangible and fragmentable, the qualitative nature of reality is multiple, constructed and holistic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). From a cognitive phenomenological perspective, a continuously developing perception creates the perceived world in a constructive or generated process, i.e. what we perceive is a function of what we do (Roth, 2004). In a quantitative approach, the knower and known are independent (a dualism), while the relationship of the knower to the known in a qualitative approach is interactive

and inseparable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While inquiry is considered value-free in the quantitative approach, in the qualitative approach it is value-bound (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Even though qualitative and quantitative research designs ontologically specify the nature of reality to be studied, they achieve similar results from different perspectives. According to Lincoln and Guba (2000), positivism's ontology, termed "naïve realism", holds that reality is "real". Cognitive phenomenology argues that different people inhabit the same physical environment and take this environment as shared, but simultaneously inhabit different life-worlds. As such, it is as wrong to assume that perspectives are completely unique as it is to assume that they are all the same (Corno et al., 2002). As such, Bryman (2006b) emphasises that reconciliation must begin with a shared notion of social phenomena in the world and therefore what is "real". Just as people can share the "facts" of everyday "reality", even when differing in the interpretations of their meaning, the "realities" of the different paradigmatic dimensions are not necessarily foundationally incompatible.

Bryman (2006b) also views the positivist and interpretivist paradigms to be complementary and not dominant, despite the fact that the two approaches differ in assumptions, purpose, approach, and researcher's role (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). However, this does not mean that the positivist never uses interviews, and that the interpretivists never use a survey, as researchers tend to adhere to the methodology that is most consonant with their socialised world (Bryman, 2006b). Also, different approaches allow researchers to know and understand different interests about the world (Bryman, 2006b).

Terre Blanche et al. (2006) suggest that positivist researchers employ a quantitative methodology to access reality by relying on the control and

manipulation of reality. This is done with the objective of providing an accurate description of the laws and mechanisms that operate in social life. It can also be inferred that attention is needed to see anything specific, which arises from access to and control over one's perceptual activity (O'Regan & Noe, 2001), when applying a cognitive phenomenology. However, researchers who use a qualitative approach believe that the reality to be studied consists of people's subjective experiences of the external world, and may adopt an intersubjective epistemological stance towards that reality. They would thus use methods that rely on the subjective relationship between themselves and the Participant, for example, interviews and Participant observation, with the objective of explaining the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind social action (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This is confirmed by cognitive phenomenology as a method of studying the knowing, learning and instruction through the employment of first-person methods, which study human activities not merely by taking the perspective of the Participant, but strive for categories that explain why and how experiences are experienced (Roth, 2004).

The other employed method is the third person, which is a scientific process that distinguishes between researchers and the researched. In this process, the line of rigour and lack of it does not lie between first- and third-person accounts but on whether descriptions are based on clear methodological grounds leading to a communal and intersubjective knowledge (Graumann, 2002). As such, qualitative research can be reconciled with the theoretical framework of cognitive psychology.

Qualitative and quantitative research methodologies also offer a complementary view of the social world because the richness of the combined approaches can enhance the precision of the findings. When an in-depth account encompasses more information, focus on precision can lead to a clarification of basic concepts. The rich descriptive data produced by qualitative research can shape the choice

of variables. Reciprocally, the effects derived from experiments can help reframe the problem and provide a new focus for in-depth descriptive study (Bryman, 2006b). This is so as cognitive phenomenology understands that a continuously developing perception creates the perceived world in a constructive or generative process as, what we perceive is a function of what we do (O'Regan & Noe, 2001). The potential interplay between these two approaches implies that they share many qualities as part of the research enterprise. In a very positive way, therefore, the two approaches are both constructive because they create data, and are mutually constitutive, reflecting the challenging interplay between words and variables (Smith & Heshusius, 1986).

Although it has been argued that qualitative (interpretive) design and cognitive science are irreconcilable, it is now clear that even though each paradigm has a different look and feel, researchers' choice of a paradigm depends on what fits in with the kind of things that they can identify with, and not because the one paradigm is better than the other (Bryman, 2006a). For example, researchers who require objective facts would prefer positivism, and interpretive research would be better suited to those who are curious about the meanings people attach to such facts (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Both research designs are therefore engaged, though they responsibly endeavour to develop principles and accounts that are not restricted by arbitrary biases (Durant & Cashman, 2003).

As approaches to gaining access to reality, cognitive phenomenology and qualitative methodologies also share something in common when it comes to examining these phenomena. However, they are deconstructive when it comes to disturbing the fabric of naturally unfolding episodes in the social world (Bryman, 2006a). The flow of events in everyday life is segmented and turned into a subject of inquiry, and the subject of inquiry and selectivity becomes an immediate source of bias and distortion (Durant & Cashman, 2003). Both

approaches deal with data, meaning that they break the flow of events in the social world and selectively focus on that behaviour of individual Participants.

Regarding the issue of complementarities between the two approaches, it has generally been assumed that qualitative research precedes a cognitive hypothesis-testing phase. The notion of the qualitative-cognitive sequence is best replaced by a position that views them as complementary (Rennie, 1998). This is because the process of research is recursive, and one approach feeds back into the other. Whereas natural history involves the rich and in-depth description of observed phenomena, including observed patterns and relationships, empirical science involves an attitude in which selected variables are abstracted from the overall phenomenon, and their interaction is carefully observed (Rennie, 1998).

Even the concept of validity need not isolate scholarly communities. In both approaches, validity expresses a concern for ecological validity, which is a type of external validity, which looks at the testing environment and determines how much it influences behaviour. It is the extent to which a finding meaningfully reflects an event or process in the world, and both paradigms bear the burdens of their doctrinal commitments (Bryman, 2006a). In many studies, there may be a trade off between internal and external validity. External validity, according to Mitchell and Jolley (2001), is the validity of generalised or causal inferences in scientific studies, which are usually based on experiments as experimental validity, and where threats to external validity interact with the independent variable. Internal validity is the approximate truth about inferences regarding causal relationships and as such, relevant to studies that try to establish a causal relationship. It can be used when there is evidence that what is done in the study caused what is observed (outcome) to happen (Shadish, Cook & Campbell, 2002).

According to Shadish et al. (2002), external validity and ecological validity are closely related in the sense that causal inferences based on ecologically valid research designs often allow for higher degrees of generalisability than those obtained in an artificially produced laboratory environment. However, some findings produced in ecologically valid research settings may hardly be generalisable, and some findings produced in highly controlled settings may claim near-universal external validity. This then makes external and ecological validity independent. Within the qualitative research paradigm, external validity is replaced by the concept of transferability, which is the ability of research results to transfer to situations with similar parameters, populations and characteristics (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Cognitive psychology tends to adopt a positivist approach to researching phenomena. However, as the above discussion suggests, it does not exclude the use of a qualitative methodology. In the case of positivism, precise operational definitions can deplete a phenomenon of its richness and texture so that it all but disappears in the rush of actual prediction. For example, measurement can transform meaning into nothingness (Wallner, 1994). According to Bryman (2006a), the two schools of thought therefore have different problems from their epistemological perspectives. Bryman suggests that reconciliation must begin with a shared notion of social phenomena in the world, and therefore, a sense of what is “real”. As such, cognitive phenomenology, together with qualitative research, seeks mutual constraints between the phenomenal field as revealed by the researcher’s experience and careful life-world analysis, and the associated field of phenomena, as studied by cognitive science (Roth, 2004). This is based on the fact that phenomenology assumes that the study of particular experience leads to the recognition of generative structures that are common to human beings more generally. It attempts to establish a scientific method that explicitly deals with experience and structures that give rise to it and thereby deal with the hard problem of cognitive science to relate personal experience and cognitive events (Roth, 2004).

3.4 PARTICIPANTS IN THIS STUDY

3.4.1 Access to potential Participants

The Participants of this study were drawn from women who formed part of an established support group for widows in Soweto. The phenomenon of support groups for widows is a new development in Black urban South African society. Participant one of this study started this support group under the auspices of the local Catholic Church in the community under study, which explains why a number of Participants were Catholics. The Participant started the group after the death of her husband, as she became more aware of the struggle of widows in the community, and after considering how fortunate she felt compared to most widows she came to know.

I initially joined the group as an observer, with the aims of understanding the members' motivation to join the group, the dynamics within the group, and also to introduce myself and invite potential Participants to join in my study. In attempting to win the Participants' confidence, I asked if I could present a topic about bereavement to the forum. The justification and objective of the study was then put forward, together with the criteria for participation. As a result of these efforts a number of widows were willing to be interviewed as Participants of this study.

3.4.2 Sampling method

According to Devers and Frankel (2000), sampling methods in qualitative research can be thought of as a rough sketch to be led in by the researcher as the study proceeds. Purposive sampling was used to select the Participants. This method of sampling in qualitative research is essentially strategic to the sampling

of cases based on interviews with an attempt to establish a good correspondence between research questions and sampling where the researcher samples on the basis of wanting to interview people who are relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2008).

The following inclusion criteria were used:

- The Participants had to be in the stage of middle adulthood, between 45 and 55 years old. The assumption made was that there was a good chance that widows in this age category would have been married for longer than 10 years (see criterion below) and so that couples who lived together that long would have had a better understanding and knowledge of their spouse than younger couples.
- The Participants must have been married for not less than 10 years, to include the probability of the task of bringing up children and possibly experiencing an empty nest.
- The mode of death included an anticipatory phase where the late husband died of terminal illnesses, for example, cancer, and HIV/AIDS. This was necessary to obtain enough data about how the Participants coped with the anticipation and real loss.
- All the Participants had to live in an urban area previously classified as a Black township, where the transition from traditional culture to modern life is evident. Although two Participants would have been classified as Coloured by the previous regime they would currently be classified as Black (Lodge, 1983), and resided in the type of area required for the study.
- Lastly, they must have been widowed for six months to a year-and-a-half. This was necessary to ensure that the widows were more or less at the same level of bereavement. However, the fact that bereavement related depression within the first two months after the loss of a loved

one resembles non-bereavement related depression (Zisook, Shear & Kendler, 2007) was taken into account. Also, it was noted that Participant 3 was the only one who did not mention the duration of her widowhood but that was established after the interview with the gatekeeper (8 months).

The exclusion criteria included mentally and physically handicapped women or those who were undergoing treatment for a psychosis (loss can trigger a psychotic episode). The exclusion criteria eliminated the involvement of additional dimensions in bereavement, which were not necessarily relevant to this study.

One Participant was attending psychotherapy sessions during the time of the interview with her. Another Participant became emotionally upset during the interview, which necessitated a therapeutic interview. Both were included in the study, however, and after the interview they were referred for further therapy.

No final decision was made at that stage regarding the number of people to be interviewed. It was envisaged that at least ten people would be interviewed, but the interviews continued until saturation point was reached in the information obtained, meaning that the themes and categories contained in the data obtained stability, and the research question was adequately answered (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Ten interviews were conducted with Participants who met the criteria and were willing to be interviewed.

3.5 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

In this study, data was collected in different ways and forms, using as many diverse sources as possible. In other words, the sources were triangulated.

Triangulation refers to the use of different data sources in a study (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). These sources included interviews (structured and semi-structured) and Participant observation, where I made observations at the funerals that I attended. As a member of the community under study, I also examined my own background to contribute to the study as objectively as possible without imposing my beliefs onto the study. I also consulted with the elders of the community under study. All the methods that were used in this study are discussed next.

3.5.1 The qualitative interview and its value

Kvale (1996) regards the research interview as a way of obtaining scientific knowledge about the social world, and the one form of the conversations of daily life in which the Participants formulate conceptions of their lived world in a dialogue. Its objective, according to Kvale (1996), is to understand the world from the Participants' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, and to uncover their world before scientific explanations. As such, qualitative researchers collect data through interviews, among other things, so that they have an opportunity to get to know Participants quite intimately (Bryman & Cassell, 2006). In this study, it enabled me to better understand how the Participants attended to information, perceived, encoded and retrieved it; and how they analysed and interpreted their experiences of the anticipated and actual death of their husband.

A face-to-face dialogue allowed the interviewer, who in this study was myself, to generate and develop questions according to the Participants' responses. Extensive probing and open-ended questions were used, in accordance with the recommendations of Bryman and Cassell (2006). The objective was to increase understanding and elicit data, detailed material and new insights that could be used in analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). To achieve that, framework within

which the interviewees could respond in a way that represented accurately and thoroughly the Participants' points of view about their bereavement was provided.

The open-ended responses to questions provided me with the main source of data. In line with Patton's findings of 1987, interviewees' responses revealed their levels of emotions, the way they organised their worlds, their thoughts about their situations, their experiences and basic perceptions.

Interviews were conducted in two phases. The initial phase was an unstructured interview, which was initiated by an open-ended, non-threatening question, requesting Participants to describe how they had previously and how they currently experienced and were coping with their bereavement? This allowed them the opportunity to express their experiences and feelings in some depth. The second phase of the interview was a semi-structured interview in which topics uncovered in the first phase were addressed.

3.5.2 Unstructured interview

The choice of an unstructured interview was decided on because it provides information that is closer to the Participants' perspective. When detailed interviewing and observation of Participants' behaviour are included (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), this form of investigation provides more depth than other types of interviewing. Unstructured interviews are therefore an appropriate and powerful way of interacting to collect and analyse empirical material in this study.

The appropriateness of the unstructured interview helped me to avoid following a rigid form. The subject matter was understood without imposing a predetermined set of questions on the conversation (Bryman & Cassell, 2006). It helped me to understand the complex behaviours of the Participants without imposing prior

categorisations that might limit the study. Instead, it reflected the Participants' experiential reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

I was a careful listener and clarified where I did not understand so as to obtain a thoroughly tested knowledge. Clarification was requested when the meaning of what the Participants said was unclear. That allowed the Participant to explain or help clarify an idea, to increase the likelihood of providing useful response, and to communicate the meaningfulness of the experience (Burgess, 1991). This served as a window into the Participants' lives (Bryman & Cassell, 2006), as the purpose was to understand how the Participants experienced their bereavement process.

The interdependent human interaction between the Participant and myself went beyond a spontaneous exchange of views, making the interview an interchange of views between researcher and Participant, conversing about a theme of mutual interest (Kvale, 1996). This was done with the objective of obtaining the meaningful statements based on interpretations of events. As a result, the research interview allowed me to capture the perspectives of the Participant (Burgess, 1991).

The quality of the information obtained largely depends on the interviewer's skills as a researcher (Patton, 1990). An in-depth, one-to-one interviewing technique may develop an understanding of how Participants translate their experiences into meaningful explanations about themselves. Gutman (1982) calls this a laddering technique. To achieve this, an interviewer needs to be a good listener and questioner, sensitive and empathic; and should have the ability to establish a non-threatening interview setting in which interviewees may feel comfortable, with adequate knowledge of the interviewees' culture and frame of reference.

This may motivate the Participant to respond, with a series of directed probes in this discovery process.

Kvale (1996) also considers the value of the research interview to be that the interview is conducted in the Participants' natural habitat. This also provides an understanding of the Participants' world from their points of view; helps to unfold the meaning of their experiences, and uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanation. In this way, knowledge about the Participants and their conditions may develop effectively without manipulating their behaviour. The strength of the research interview helps to capture the multitude of the Participants' views on a theme, and in the process, provides a picture of a multifaceted human world.

During the interviews in the current study, the Participants and I talked freely (Burgess, 1991) to facilitate free and open responses. This helped me to capture the interviewee's perception in her own words. I became an attentive listener, shaping the process into a familiar and comfortable form of social engagement. That allowed me flexibility in conducting interviews with particular interviewees or circumstances. It also provided an opportunity to explore topics in depth, affording me the opportunity to experience the affective and the cognitive aspects of responses (Burgess, 1991).

Unstructured interviews have their own disadvantages (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), including that they are time-consuming. In this study I conducted all the interviews to avoid possible inconsistencies across interviews due to the flexible nature of unstructured conversations. Another disadvantage is that the volume of the information tends to be very large, making it difficult to transcribe and reduce data.

3.5.3 Semi-structured interview

After the unstructured interview phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the same Participants. These interviews allowed for focused, conversational two-way communication, where the objective was to give and receive more information and obtain clarity on the responses from the first phase of interviews. My focus was on themes that were not covered in the unstructured interview. To create a framework for the interview, I commenced with general questions and topics that were guided by uncovered themes, some of which were created during the interview. That allowed both the interviewee and myself the flexibility to probe for details. As a result, specific and general information relevant to issues was obtained to gain a range of insights on those issues.

The semi-structured interview process confirmed what I had already learnt from the unstructured interview, but also provided me with the opportunity to learn more from the interviewee by providing not only answers, but also reasons for those answers, as the interviewees more easily discussed sensitive issues. The interviewees were also able to ask questions.

3.5.4 Interview guides

A list of topics was compiled for the unstructured interviewing phase based on the literature reviewed as well as my experience of dealing with widows from Black urban areas. In accordance with Bryman's (2008) suggestion, an unstructured interview was also conducted with one of the Participants for the purpose of compiling the list of topics. The first unstructured interview served as a pilot study with the objective of collecting preliminary data, identifying potential practical problems, and so increase the likelihood of the success of the study in preparation for the semi-structured interviews (De Vaus, 1993).

After the pilot interview the list of topics for the unstructured interviews was finalised as follows:

- The Participants' relationships with their late husbands
- The mode of death
- How society responded to the widow before the death of the spouse
- How society responded to the widow after the death of the spouse
- The widow's personal emotional experience of society before the death of her spouse
- The widow's personal emotional experience of society after the death of her spouse
- How the widow interprets society's response
- The widow's personal emotional experience and interpretation of self
- How the widow copes with her bereavement
- Support structures for the widow
- Reasons for joining the support group
- How the support group is experienced
- Rituals the widow performed and what they meant to her, including the scripts she followed during the mourning period

Once I had completed the unstructured interviews and reflected on the responses, I developed an interview guide for the semi-structured interviews with the purpose of probing deeper and more extensively into certain topics (Bryman & Cassell, 2006).

The semi-structured interview guide covered the following topics:

- The personal characteristics of the couples – 1. The nature of the couples' relationships (a. patterns of communication and cooperation b. perceptions and attributions) 2. The couples' knowledge and understanding of the illness 3. The different roles played by the Participants and their husbands 4. Strengths and vulnerabilities
- The Participants' challenges and how they dealt with them – 1. Past significant losses in the widows' lives 2. Stressors 3. Caring and treatment regimen of the dying husbands (a. non-compliance and other unique challenges b. the attitudes towards and responses to the illnesses and its ramifications)
- The Participants' experiences of stressors – 1. Physical symptoms 2. The widows' response to the news of their husbands' deaths 3. Emotions experienced
- Coping – 1. The couples' resources 2. The Participants' approaches to their challenges 3. The Participants' coping styles 4. Participation in African death rituals

The abovementioned topics helped determine whether each Participant's bereavement process is either functional or dysfunctional, how it came to be, and why this was, especially in comparison with the other Participants – in other words, how the Participants perceived, encoded and retrieved, analysed and interpreted their loss.

3.5.5 Interview procedure

The appointments with the Participants were made by Participant one of this study. She arranged a time that suited the Participants and invited them to her home where the interviews were conducted individually by the researcher in a quiet, private room. Each interview lasted about an hour-and-a-half to two hours.

All the interviews were conducted in the Participants' first languages, namely, Sotho, Tswana or Zulu as the interviewer is fluent in all three languages.

I attempted to create a sense of involvement and caring in the interview so as penetrate beyond the Participant's superficial reasons and rationalisations of behaviour to discover more fundamental patterns underlying each Participant's perceptions and behaviour (Gutman, 1982). As in the unstructured interview, it was also critical for me to establish rapport before the actual in-depth probing, and to maintain it during the course of the interview to instil confidence in the Participants for them to express their opinions (Gutman, 1982).

Interviews were recorded on tape with the permission of the Participants. This allowed me to keep a full record of the interview without having to be distracted by detailed note keeping (Bryman, 2008). However, I took note that tape-recording might detract from the intimacy of the encounter, with both the researcher and the Participants in part performing for the tape-recorder rather than really talking to each other (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

In striving to achieve a good interview, I listened more and talked less, followed up on what the Participant said, asked questions when she did not understand without interruptions, asked to hear more about a subject for concrete details, and explored the Participant's responses. I allowed the interview to flow spontaneously while in the process, covering the scheduled themes.

During the process and in accordance with the recommendations of Terre Blanche et al. (2006), I made brief notes of important events that might not be obvious from listening to the tape recorder. Scribbling questions and thoughts that occurred to me during the interview also helped. However, for that to be effective, I had to know my interview guide well in an attempt to avoid constant reference to the format, or interrupt what is a crucial characteristic of a good

interview, namely, the flow of the interview (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In this way, the Participants became co-enquirers, changing the interview into a conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee, instead of a question and answer session.

At the end of the interview the Participant was asked if she had anything more to say. At that moment it was important for the interviewer to be aware of what the Participant was saying after the recorder had been switched off. Sometimes interesting understandings only emerge then (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). It was therefore important to select a private setting for the Participants (Bryman & Cassell, 2006).

It is advisable to make notes about the interview as soon as possible after the interview as well, writing down anything that might not be obvious from the recording. For example, how the interviewer felt at a particular point in time during the interview so as to give clarity to the content and mood of the interview setting. Interview notes also included interesting issues that were discussed after the recorder were switched off, ideas that occurred during the interview, and additional questions the researcher would have liked to ask (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Notes were also taken during the interview to help recall the comments that might be garbled or unclear on the tape (Bryman & Cassell, 2006).

From the above, it seems clear that the method of interviewing was an appropriate choice for this study. My flexibility, expertise and interpersonal skills allowed the interviewee to describe what was meaningful to her, using her own words in a relaxed atmosphere (Bryman, 2008). That allowed me to probe for more details and ensured that the interviewees were interpreting questions in the way that was intended.

3.5.6 Participant observations

Observations were another powerful tool in the data collection process, which focused on the actual behaviour of the Participants during events related to the topic of research, for example, death rituals. This technique was used to supplement interviews and gain access to the context of the Participants, understand their everyday subjectivity, and grasp meaning attached to those observations. This was considered important as the meaning of human creations - words, actions and experiences - can only be ascertained in reaction to the contexts in which they occur, including both personal and societal contexts (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). As a member of the community under study, these were my observations over time.

In an attempt to take advantage of the first-hand experience of the subject matter in Participant observation, I chose (a) the “Participant as observer” and (b) “observation only” approaches, depending on the situation (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In the former, I made my presence and role as a researcher known, and behaved in accordance with accepted custom of the community. I did this to minimise the effects of my presence on the community's usual behaviour and social processes, while resisting being drawn into relationships and patterns of behaviour that were not conducive to my research. In the observation only approach, I merely watched and recorded what happened (Harper, 1994). The death rituals I observed included the period between the arrival of the body at the deceased's house the afternoon before the burial and the ceremony following the burial. I noted the deep emotional pain that the deceased's loved ones experienced, some crying, and the silence and respect showed at that time where everybody stopped what they were doing until the coffin was in the bedroom. I noticed how the overall mood changed in the course of the evening, the night vigil, and the sermon at home the following morning before attending the church burial ceremony. I also observed and noted that when the deceased

was male, a male animal would be slaughtered, and when it was a female, a female animal would be slaughtered.

Even though I am a member of the community under study, I am not part of the elders and also not part of the support group. I was also not necessarily aware of most of the death rituals, and there was no need for me to conceal my lack of experience and knowledge in the setting. Also, in taking advantage of the first-hand experience of the subject matter, I chose to reveal my identity to Participant one during a death ritual ceremony by introducing myself, expressing interest, and requesting more information and clarification regarding the procedure. That helped me to gain access to a setting where I may not have been accepted otherwise, including informal discussions with elders in the community to help clarify the meanings of the events. In keeping the setting as natural as possible, I blended in with the environment, with the purpose of sharing in the daily experiences of the people involved and to minimise the social distance that might have existed between the Participants and myself. This helped me to gain an intimate qualitative understanding of the complex social phenomena from the perspective of the community that the Participants live in (Harper, 1994).

I kept note of ideas that I developed about the phenomenon under study, my reflections on ethical issues for conducting the research, and the points of uncertainty that I needed to clarify as data collection continued. I also noted my behaviour, emotional reactions, thoughts and plans, as they are an important source of data. I minimised the effects of my presence on a community's usual behaviour and social process by becoming one of the crowd in participating in social events, adopted the language and dress of the group, and striking a balance between too much participation and too little (Bryman & Cassell, 2006). This is in line with Harper's (1994) view, which is that Participant observers collect data with more tentative and less detailed hypotheses than in quantitative research. Participant observers take advantage of the first-hand experience of

the subject matter, so as to develop, revise and test hypotheses while learning more about the Participants' setting.

My observations at funerals in the community revealed descriptions of the Participants' behaviours in context, allowing me to identify recurring patterns of Participants' behaviours that might not have been recognised by either the Participants themselves or myself. This provided rich data that included nonverbal and physical behaviour.

3.6 ETHICAL ASPECTS

Ethical considerations are very important in any study (Eide & Kahn, 2008). The protection of the Participants' interest and well-being was a central ethical concern in this study. As the interviews were expected to elicit intense emotional discussions on the death of the Participants' husbands, emotional safety was essential. As a result, provision was made for referrals to relevant health professionals should Participants experience emotional difficulties.

Qualitative data, by its nature, is highly accessible. It consists of verbal descriptions which can be easily be read by anyone (Flick, Kardoff & Steinke, 2001). It is therefore important to maintain the confidentiality of the source of data and the anonymity of the Participants. This requires that all records be such that there is no possibility that the source of the information can ever be identified. This makes confidentiality and anonymity important requirements for credible research (Flick et al., 2001).

Confidentiality and anonymity of the interviews of the Participants was maintained throughout the study. The Participants gave permission to tape record the interviews. To achieve this, the researcher communicated clearly and

directly the confidentiality of the interviews to the Participants in an attempt to reassure them, and tape-recorded data was kept in a safe place (Bryman & Cassell, 2006). This was important, as some Participants would not willingly express their most private details, opinions and emotions knowing that their identity would be published. In some cases, the researcher further concealed the Participants' personal details where necessary, without distorting the important elements of the data, to ensure that Participants could not be identified from their responses quoted in the presentation of the findings.

The identifying information of the Participants was removed from the data as soon as it was no longer necessary. The cassettes used for tape-recording the interviews were destroyed on completion of the study. The Participants were also assured that the tapes would be labelled anonymously, using numbers. Their names were also replaced by with randomly chosen letters of the alphabet. The brief and general biographies of the Participants are reported in such a manner that confidentiality was maintained.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis process of this study was based on Miles and Huberman's (1994) method with other sources providing additional detail. The process started with managing the data, which is discussed next.

3.7.1 Data management

The tape-recorded collected data were transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts were used to arrive at a contextual understanding so as to reconstruct for the reader the emotional journeys undertaken by the Participants. As interviews were conducted in Sotho, Tswana and Zulu, they were translated into English

during transcription because this thesis is written in English and also to make them accessible to more readers.

In addition to the verbatim transcriptions of the raw data, I included descriptions of the Participants' characteristics, enthusiasm, body language and the overall mood during the interview. The transcription method was used to prepare the material from the interview for analysis (Bryman, 2006a; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Quotes were extracted and rendered in a written style and linked to the text they were related to with a clarification of the context of the quotes. The collected data were in written up transcriptions of interviews, and included notes made during Participant observation as well as notes made subsequent to the interviews. The notes of the interviews were used to recall the comments that were garbled or unclear on the tape for detailed comparison with the transcriptions.

Miles and Huberman's (1994) data reduction, data display, conclusion and verification then followed. The qualitative interviews and their transcripts used in this study produced a large volume of material, which needed to be condensed, categorised, interpreted and made meaningful. For this reason, the Miles and Huberman method was considered the most appropriate.

3.7.2 Data reduction

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), data reduction is the process of selection, focus, simplification of data. In the process, the data are abstracted and transformed. As too many data were generated in this study for meaningful interpretation, they were condensed during a data reduction process, where sections were highlighted with a marker pen, and a list of codes generated. The

meaningfully reduced data were then transformed and organised to help make sense of the subject matter.

In initiating the data reduction process, data selection focused on distilling the different experiences expressed by different Participants. The differences and similarities between personal observations, informal discussions and data collected from the interviews were then set out without diluting the richness of the data. Specific content of the Participants' views was explored, while taking note of the relative frequency with which the different issues were raised, including the intensity with which they were expressed (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

These aspects of the reduced data were meaningfully categorised with the main objective of avoiding a large volume of unassimilated and uncategorised data, using a combination of deductive and inductive analysis. While shaping the initial categorisation it was important for me to remain open to new information so as to induce new meanings from the available data. In this way I arrived at a preliminary understanding of the meaning of the data by the time the data analysis commenced. The data were analysed by taking all the material and immersing myself again in it, working with interview scripts and field notes. By the time I had finished, I knew the data well enough to know more or less what could be found where, what sorts of interpretation were likely to be supported by the data and what would not to be supported (Terre Blanche et al, 2006).

In a qualitative study, there is no clear point when data collection stops and analysis begins; rather, the one gradually fades into the other (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). As a result, I stayed close to the data to interpret it from a position of empathic understanding and to place real life events and phenomena into perspective. This is possible as qualitative analysis deals in words and is guided by few universal rules and standardised procedures (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

In this study, data were analysed before the data collection had been completed, applying the “principle of interaction between data and analysis” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993, p. 114). This occurred especially in situations where analysis of the Participants’ statements occurred during the interview itself (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Shaw, 1999). The qualitative modes of analysis provided ways of discerning, examining, comparing and contrasting, and interpreting meaningful patterns or themes. Data were analysed and synthesised from different angles to achieve meaningfulness through a systematic and intensely disciplined qualitative analysis. Through a loop-like pattern of multiple revisits of the data, additional questions emerged, new connections unearthed, and more complex formulations developed with a deepening understanding of the subject matter (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

Throughout the course of analysis, the patterns and common themes emerged. During the process, the data were repeatedly revisited to redefine and regroup categories until the results reached stability. How the patterns, themes and emerging stories helped illuminate the broad question of study was examined. Deviations from these patterns and any factors that might explain the typical responses were noted. The broad study question needed revision where the emerged patterns or findings suggested additional data that needed to be collected (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

Patton (1990) states that each qualitative study is unique, which suggests a unique analytical approach. The human factor was both the greatest strength and fundamental weakness of this qualitative inquiry and analysis because the inquiry depends at every stage on the skills, training, insights, and capabilities of the researcher, so that the findings ultimately depend on the analytic intellect and style of the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data were further broken down into labelled meaningful pieces or codes, so that the bits of coded material could later be clustered together under the code heading. The coded headings were further analysed both as a cluster and in relation to other clusters. This suggested a blend of thematising and coding between categories. This process helped to break up the sequence so that different events and remarks could be associated, and parts of the text that appear to belong together could be carefully compared (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

In comparing parts of the text that appeared to belong together, implicit assumptions were recognised and addressed. The answers relied on a combination of observations during interviews, transcriptions, the researcher's observations of society, and theory. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that researcher's ability to listen for and be receptive to the unexpected differing patterns of interconnection in data lead to the discovery and manipulation of those informative patterns that might have presented fresh analytic insights or challenges for further elaboration and verification of an evolving conclusion.

Sub-issues and themes surfaced during this phase, capturing the finer nuances of meaning that were not captured originally. This process was repeated until no further significant new insights appeared to emerge (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The interpretation of the Participants' experiences and how they coped with them were combined in a written account, using thematic categories from analysis as sub-headings. In the process, ambiguous points and contradictions were included in the interpretation, instances of over-interpretation, including researcher's prejudices (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

3.7.3 Data display

Data display went a step beyond data reduction, with the purpose of providing an organised and compressed assembly of information that allowed conclusions to be drawn. This helped to extrapolate enough data so as to start discerning systematic patterns and interrelationships (Miles & Huberman, 1994). At this stage, additional higher order categories and themes arose naturally from the data that went beyond those discovered in the data reduction stage, which at the same time had a bearing on the research question (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

In this study, all Participants went through the bereavement process. However, their experiences because of personal characteristics, culture and demographics, relationship with family members, attachment style, and support structure. As a result, patterns of interrelationships between Participants' data were discerned to determine the differences and similarities. Themes and sub-themes generated were displayed in tabular format and described (see the section on drawing conclusion and verification below). A model of the cognitive-affective-behavioural network of bereavement was developed based on the findings, literature and theory and is set out in chapter 5.

3.7.4 Drawing conclusions and verification

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the meanings emerging from the data need to be tested for their plausibility, sturdiness and confirmability. The meaning of the analysed data and the assessment of its implications for the research question were considered in the conclusion drawing stage. This stage was a way of arranging and thinking about the textually embedded data. As verification is integrally linked to drawing conclusions, it involved revisiting the data as many

times as necessary to verify the emergent conclusions. Attention was given to the stability and credibility of the results (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data were systematically examined and re-examined to generate meaning. Themes that had a bearing on the research question arose from the data. These themes were induced to infer general rules or classes from specific instances. Terre Blanche et al. (2006) advise that the researcher reads through her texts many times over in an attempt to try and work out the organising principles, which naturally underlie the material. Tactics like identifying patterns and themes, clustering cases, making contrasts and comparisons, partitioning variables, and subsuming particulars in the general were employed simultaneously and iteratively. Themes were rearranged for a smaller number of the main themes, with several sub-themes under each. Broader overarching themes were used to incorporate sub-themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In summary, it is quite clear that analysis is not just the end product but also the repertoire of processes used to arrive at a particular stage (Kvale, 1996). This relates to the researcher's skilful, artful and persuasive way of crafting an argument, how and why she drew certain conclusions and on what bases she excluded other possible interpretations. It also includes how logical the analysis is and how it makes sense in relation to the study's objectives and the presented data (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

3.8 CONSISTENCY AND INTEGRITY OF THE STUDY

The consistency and integrity of the data analysis and interpretation is important in qualitative research (Kvale, 1996). The way in which the trustworthiness of the data was established in this study discussed in the sections that follow.

3.8.1 Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the notion of trustworthiness of the data ensures the quality of data in qualitative evaluation in four different ways, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In this study, the trustworthiness of the data was crucial so that the evaluation report could effectively communicate research findings. As a result, trustworthiness was enhanced in different ways.

3.8.1.1 Credibility

Credibility is analogous to internal validity. It relates to the way the researcher co-constructs the generated knowledge and the views the Participants express in the process of the inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Credibility involves a correspondence between the way in which the Participants perceive certain issues, and the way in which the researcher portrays their viewpoints (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Stable, trustworthy and credible knowledge is initiated during the establishment of the relationship between the researcher and the Participants.

In this study, the purpose of the study was explained to the Participants and their cooperation was sought. In this sense, credibility was more personal and interpersonal than methodological (Reason & Rowan, 1981). Prolonged engagement also enhanced credibility. This refers to "the investment of enough time to achieve certain purposes, for example, learning the culture of the participants, testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the researcher or of the participants, and building trust" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301).

The Participants were seen as individuals in their own right, and their uniqueness was respected. Through frankness and honesty, I endeavoured to establish a position of trust with the Participants, and I attempted to create a climate of freedom so that the Participants could express their true feelings and opinions without fear of disapproval. A relationship of mutual respect was established to facilitate the revelation of information.

To further establish credibility, *peer debriefing* was used. Peer debriefing is the process of "allowing a peer who is a professional outside the context and who has some general understanding of the study to analyse, test working hypotheses and emerging designs, and listen to the researcher's ideas and concerns" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 140). In this study, the researcher's initial promoter (Prof. Johan Schoeman) served as a peer who challenged the researcher's thoughts and experiences where necessary. The research process, research situation and context were also described in detail so that the reader may ascertain if and to what extent the research results are trustworthy and credible.

3.8.1.2 Transferability

Transferability, as one of the elements of trustworthiness, refers to the possibility that what was found in one context by a piece of qualitative research is applicable to another context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the present study, this was accounted for through Miles and Huberman's data analysis process, and depended on the presentation of solid descriptive data to improve analysis (Patton, 1990). Transferability was confirmed through Participant observation and talking to people in the community.

3.8.1.3 Dependability

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), dependability is the equivalent of the term “reliability” which, in quantitative research terms, means that the same tests should produce the same results across testing situations. In qualitative research terms, this is impossible to realise because of the flexibility of the research design, and the production of research findings by constant changes in interactions between the researcher and Participants. Each researcher interprets differently with different conclusions. Guba and Lincoln (1989) consider these changes to be an indication of a maturing and successful inquiry in qualitative research. The researcher established dependability by consistently examining the research process as it occurred.

3.8.1.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is the equivalent of objectivity, which is concerned with establishing that the data and interpretations of an inquiry were not just figments of the researcher's imagination (Schwandt, 1997). To address the truth-value, confirmability and consistency of the results, the Participants' first-hand experience of their life-world formed the focus, rather than speculative explanations of it.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the meanings emerging from the data need to be tested for their plausibility, sturdiness and confirmability. Analytic confirmability in this study encompassed a broader concern of whether the conclusions drawn were credible, defensible, warranted and able to withstand alternative explanations. Confirmability was achieved by trying to determine the extent to which Participants' experiences reflected trends in the broader society (Schwandt, 1997).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that confirmability and dependability can be determined through one properly managed audit, and are realised by similar techniques in qualitative research, for example, through auditing by the research supervisor. According to Schwandt (1997, p.6), this is "a procedure whereby a third party examiner systematically reviews the audit trail maintained by the inquirer". In this study, the audit trail included recorded materials such as cassette tapes, interview transcripts, details of Participants, notes about research procedures, interviews and discussions. The researcher's initial promoter served as the auditor for this study, reviewing the data, methodology and analysis process for consistency and applicability, and making suggestions for changes and improvements. Suggested reconsiderations were negotiated until agreement was reached on the consistency and applicability of the process.

However, reanalysis through auditing may invade the Participants' privacy with the potential of harming them (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This was avoided by removing any identifying information about the Participants before discussing the data with the auditor.

As a member of the community under study, I also examined my own background to contribute to the study without imposing my beliefs to the study. This was done through applying reflexivity, which is discussed in the section that follows.

3.9 REFLEXIVITY

Ellingson (1998) states that reflexivity refers to the researcher's awareness of self in relation to the research process, which, according to May (1998), is a process of self-examination. The fact that qualitative researchers use themselves as research instruments for both data collection and analysis makes qualitative

research evaluations contingent on the subjectivity of the researcher (May, 1998). This then makes it important to cultivate reflexivity, and to document personal reflections (Ellingson, 1998). In this way, qualitative methods account for themselves to satisfy the demands of scientific method (May, 1998). Later in this section some personal reflections are presented. My subjectivity is checked by confirming my experiences and knowledge of both traditional and transitional African ways of dealing with death and its rituals with some elders of the community under study. Furthermore, I attempted to remain focused on the Participants' first-hand experience of their life-world as it was without imposing my own experiences and beliefs on the data.

Reflexivity has two dimensions, namely, endogenous and referential (May, 1998). Endogenous reflexivity is the examination of the processes by which communities constitute their social reality. For example, this would examine how the experiences of the widows are constructed within the broader community. This is based on Garfinkel's (1967) argument that actions and statements within any field can only be fully understood from within the context that they were produced.

Referential reflexivity, according to Bourdieu (1988), is the study of the relations between the researcher and the researched. The problem of referential reflexivity is that communities have their own ontological structures of great subtlety and sophistication and that they are often not sufficiently appreciated (Worsley, 1997). Also, it is not just the immediate relations between the researcher and the researched that must be brought into question, but much deeper questions of cultural and class affiliation should be considered if findings are to be more accountable and accessible, culturally specific, and open to local evaluation (Harding, 1991). Researchers therefore run the risk of imposing ontological structures arbitrarily from their own already dominant culture.

I applied a reflexive approach to help me to avoid the illusion that I did not have illusions (Bourdieu, 1988). In fact, awareness of reflexivity offered the possibility that, in unveiling the determinants surrounding the research, I acquired a relative freedom from such determinants (Bourdieu, 1996). It also made methodologies more transparent and accountable.

To achieve this, emphasis was placed on developing stable, trustworthy and credible knowledge (see also section 3.4.9) during the establishment of the researcher-Participant relationship. Achieving a relationship of mutual confidence and respect also facilitated information sharing. For example, the purpose of the study was explained to the Participant and co-operation was requested to make credibility personal and interpersonal. Potentially speculative explanations of the Participants' first-hand experience were systematically challenged by the study's promoter where necessary for extensive periods of time, questioning the researcher's views with the idea of generating understanding of the meaning of data and so enhancing the stability and credibility of the data. My own background and experiences, as the third data source, were examined with the purpose of determining how this could influence the interpretation of data.

During the data collection phase, I developed excessive high blood pressure, and I felt threatened by my health problems. Reflecting on my experience helped me gain a better understanding of people who are seriously ill. My experience helped me to understand what the dying partner of the women I interviewed might have gone through. For example, seeing his family doing their best to make him feel comfortable might have made the husband feel simultaneously guilty for causing his family trouble and yet appreciative of their care. However, none of the Participants of this study expressed feelings of resentment towards their husbands for the burden of care they may have carried. This may be because the interviews were conducted some time after the death of the husbands and as such, the Participants may have been focusing more on their current emotions.

3.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced and made explicit the assumptions underpinning the research design. The chosen methodology, qualitative research, was reconciled with the theoretical framework of cognitive psychology, which tends to favour quantitative methods. The selection of the 10 Participants using purposive sampling was described. Data collection methods included in-depth interviews (unstructured and semi-structured) and Participant observations. Miles and Huberman's data analysis process includes data management, data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. The ethical issues of the protection of the Participants' interest and well-being, maintaining the confidentiality of the source of data and the anonymity of the Participants, and concealing the Participants' personal details and identifying information were addressed. Ways of ensuring the consistency and integrity of the data were discussed, included credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

The chapter that follows presents the description of the Participants and the themes generated from the data analysis.