

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The research methodology is crucial in establishing whether the aims of a study can be met and therefore adding value in the area of research. By not identifying a methodology that will support the aims of a study, the entire research project could potentially be lost.

The research methodology followed for this study will identify why a qualitative approach was followed rather than a quantitative approach especially when seen within a feminist research framework. Alongside this, the nature of the study as an exploratory study will be explained to again support the use of a qualitative approach. Problems experienced with the population, sampling and the rationale for using a non-purposive sampling technique will also be discussed. The data collection in terms of access to respondents, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality within the interview process will be discussed. Finally, the details regarding the reduction and analysis of data will be provided in terms of the transcribing of the interviews, the conceptualisation of data, the coding of data as well as the analysing of data which led to the research findings.

3.2. AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to investigate the reasons given by women for choosing to terminate a pregnancy over other alternatives to deal with an unwanted pregnancy.

The study aims to come to a better understanding of the relationship between reasons and sets of reasons that ultimately influence women in their decision making process as to whether or not to terminate their unwanted pregnancy.

3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

Groenewald (1988:68) defines a research design typology by differentiating between five basic research designs, namely, the case study, the historical study, the experiment, the typological study and the survey. From these five broad bands, numerous new research designs were born, namely qualitative research, quantitative research, content analysis and comparative research. Groenewald (1988:68) states that the terms qualitative and quantitative research methods within this typology, encompasses the previously mentioned types of research.

Researchers today have the opportunity to choice from a multitude of research designs but the most encapsulating terms used is that of qualitative and quantitative research, which in turn is encapsulated and supported by theoretical approaches and methods of data collection and analysis.

Although contemporary social researchers have tried to close the gap that persists between the use of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies for social research, the differentiation continues to exist. According to Neuman (1997:327), although differences exist, the similarities must also be taken into consideration. The aim of both research methodologies is to ultimately seek the truth to a specific problem and a common ground should be found in the combined utilisation of qualitative and quantitative methodologies as both methodologies share basic principles of science but each has its strengths and limitations dependant on the topic or issue at hand. Although a combined utilisation is not denied, it was not deemed appropriate for the purposes of this study.

International statistical research regarding the reasons that women give to terminate their pregnancy, is based on quantitative analysis of the single reasons and factors that influence this decision. This provides a framework for investigation but because it only focuses on the most frequently cited averages, it does not provide us with a true narrative from a woman's personal experience. The statistics do not show a relationship between reasons and does not indicate sets of reasons but focuses on the ranking of reasons in terms of the most frequently mentioned or recorded. This was seen to be a limitation for the aim of this study, and therefore a qualitative approach was decided on.

A qualitative research methodology was therefore chosen as it indeed does construct social reality and cultural meaning; it focuses on the interactive processes and events and values, not only between the researcher and the respondent, but also within the situation specific reality for the respondent. It was important to provide a platform for women to narrate their personal experiences and situations as to what reasons influenced them to make their decision. Qualitative research also provided a situationally constrained environment as only twelve interviews were conducted. The analysis of the data is based in thematic analysis and the researcher does not stand in isolation to the respondent or the theme under investigation.

The focus of this research was therefore based on qualitative methods of data collection due to:

- the nature of the study,
- the sensitive nature or topic of the study,

- access to respondents,
- understanding the respondents own frame of reference while conducting the research, and
- allowing the respondent to “tell her own personal story” as to why she opted to terminate her pregnancy and did not seek out other alternatives.

The term qualitative research is used as an umbrella term to refer to various research strategies that share a common denominator. The data that is collected is rich in the description of people, places and conversations that is not fully explored or encapsulated by statistics as per the use of qualitative data collection. According to Bogdan and Bilken (1996:2) research questions are not framed operationalising variables but rather formulated to investigating topics in all their complexity and in context. As previously stated, the aim of the research was to allow women to narrate their own personal stories and the data collected is viewed in terms of relationships between reasons and sets of reasons without placing a numerical or quantitative value to their personal circumstances. This reduces women to a number and does not allow for the full integration of possible reasons which could lead to data being lost.

Qualitative data collection does not approach the research with structured specific questions to answer or hypothesis to test, but rather try to understand certain behaviour from the subjects own frame of reference while external causes are of secondary importance (Bogdan and Bilken, 1996:2). By allowing women to tell their own stories, it allowed for women to provide their own interpretation to classified themes or reasons as these differ in terms of perceptions and where a person stands in relation to a certain theme. Data is therefore collected through the sustained contact with people in their personal settings and their personal experience of a specific action or setting and the meaning that they ascribe to this. We can only come to understand the decisions made by women to terminate their pregnancies, if a “voice” is given to their personal situations and circumstances that allowed for them to exercise their decision making rights. The study did not want to test a specific hypothesis but rather investigate their personal settings and experiences which ultimately led to their decision to terminate their pregnancy. Qualitative research allows for this study to be more open to using a range of evidence and to discover new issues that might not fall within the framework that has been cited for women to undergo an abortion.

Due to the nature of this research, the focus was on the use of a qualitative approach but this in no way undermines the use and contribution of quantitative research. To understand the aim of the study, a more open and creative approach was needed,

therefore the use of qualitative research, but the study did make use of nominal and ordinal questions to obtain demographical data which would lead to our understanding of the demographical characteristics of women that terminated their pregnancy. This was incorporated when looking at the demographic profile of respondents as well as certain determinants for contraceptive use as well as reasons for terminating a pregnancy.

Of importance is the fact that up until the 1980's, research was predominantly quantitative in nature due to the adherence to a positivistic research framework as depicted by Neuman (1994:63): "*Positivism sees social science as an organised method for combining deductive logic with precise empirical observations of individual behaviour in order to discover and confirm a set of probabilistic causal laws that can be used to predict general patterns of human activity*". This stands in contrast to the qualitative methodology which uses inductive logic and does not aim at proving or disproving a set hypothesis with empirical and objective data as the aim is not to always generalise the findings.

During the 1980's, two additional approaches or theoretical frameworks came to the foreground, namely Feminist research and Post-modern research. Both feminist research and Post-modern research further developed into different research fields within the each specific research approach.

Feminist research forms the basis of this investigation. The basis on which this research project was conducted was that of a woman's right to exert her choice regarding her reproductive behaviour and ultimately, her choice regarding her pregnancy aligned to women's and human rights. Because women can exert a choice regarding their reproductive behaviour it does not mean that all women will choose to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. This can however only be investigated if we give women a platform for voicing their reasons that led them to decide to terminate their pregnancy.

Feminist research is conducted by researchers who hold a feminist self-identity and consciously use a feminist perspective (Neuman,1997:80). Feminist methodology attempts to give a "voice" to women as women express themselves differently than men. This can be ascribed again to our personal understanding and experience of our social reality. It is important for women to relay their stories by placing it within their own personal terms of reference and social reality which is shaped by their experiences and understanding. The research is also based on an awareness that the subjective experience differs from an Interpretative or Positivist perspective which is based on a male orientation of being objective, logical, task orientated, and instrumental (Neuman, 1997:80).

The Feminist orientation upholds that the social world is a web of interconnected human relations, and tends to emphasise the subjective, empathetic, process orientated and inclusive side of social life (Neuman,1997:80). Bogdan and Bilken (1996:27) state that gender is the central topic; not only within the research, but also within the reality that women ascribe to themselves. Neuman (1997:80) states that the generalisations of research of the experience of men are generalised to all people and ignores gender as a fundamental social division while using male points of reference. Bogdan and Bilken (1996:27) align to this but add that feminism affects the content of the research as the researcher studies how the respondents make sense of the way gender constructs their world as women. This allows for the interpretations of women to take center stage and allows for their personal interpretation of their reality, thus their “voice” to be heard, especially regarding the factors in their lives that led women to decide to terminate their pregnancy.

Based within in this context, an exploratory research design was followed. According to Neuman (1997:19), exploratory research is aimed at exploring a new topic or issue of which there is little information. The goal is to formulate a premise of understanding for the formulation of more precise questions for a more systematic and extensive future research. The aim of this research was to be used as a premise for a more detailed study on women that terminate their pregnancy at a later stage when more details are known regarding their decision making and their reasons or sets of reasons, and the linked relationship between these. As previously stated, quantitative analysis of reasons have been conducted but did not investigate the relationship between reasons but rather isolated reasons in terms of ranking or frequency. Exploratory research does not aim at providing definitive answers but rather addresses the “What?” (Neuman;1997:21). This directly corresponds to the theme of the research as to what are the reasons or causes for women to terminate their pregnancy? What are the underlying factors that influence their decision?

Neuman (1997:20) establishes the goals of exploratory research as follows:

- to become familiar with the basic facts, people and concerns involved;
- to develop a well-grounded mental picture of what is occurring;
- to generate many ideas and develop tentative theories and conjectures;
- to determine the feasibility of doing additional research;
- formulate questions and refine issues for more systematic enquiry; and
- to develop techniques and a sense of direction for future research.

When taking the above into consideration it is clear that this was the best option to follow for the study as we first needed to establish a relationship with respondents in terms of the sensitive nature of the study. Because current studies are quantitative in nature, it was deemed crucial to let women tell their own stories from their own personal viewpoint to establish whether relationships between reasons and sets of reasons exist or whether these stand in isolation to each other. This allowed for a profile of respondents to be established as well as constant new themes or reasons to be established with each interview. Due to the findings (to be discussed in detail in Chapter 4), it was possible to make certain recommendations for further research and further studies.

Neuman (1997:19) continues that exploratory research is difficult to conduct as there are few guidelines to follow as the steps are not well defined and the research may change direction during the research process. This was found to be true for the research study. Although each respondent told their personal story, many similarities came to the foreground but which also differed in terms of importance. Respondents were questioned further to add additional explanations or definitions to specific statements which changed the direction of the interview and which led to further themes being uncovered. Due to the nature of the study, exploratory research also allowed for a more open-minded, flexible and investigative stance that allows for the exploration as to the relationship between reasons and sets of reasons that influence women decide to undergo an abortion.

Various methods of data collection exist within the context of qualitative research e.g. observation, participant – observation, structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, un-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, focus groups, historical research and comparative studies. Each of these methods of data collection has their merits and greatly depends on the nature of the topic under investigation. Due to the fact that the research was focused on a qualitative approach based within a feminist theoretical base, and being exploratory by nature, a semi-structured interview was chosen for data collection.

A semi-structured interview was conducted on a one-on-one basis with 12 consenting respondents to obtain the required information during the period February-November 2000. The reason for using a semi-structured interview was due to the fact that some questions had to be pre-populated to structure the interview to obtain the desired information while at the same time not curbing the information that respondents give. It had to be open-ended for the women to elaborate and explain their decision to have an abortion in their own words and understanding of their situation and experiences.

It also allowed the researcher to probe further into specific statements that were made to gain a clearer and better understanding of their circumstances, situations and their rationale to decide to end their pregnancy.

The respondents also led the interview dependant on their responses. The order of the questions differed and was sometimes addressed within another set of reasons. Respondents also directed the interview in terms of what they deemed more important as well as how these reasons interlinked with one another.

Respondents would not have partaken in the research if a trusting relationship was not established and if the researcher did not display understanding and listening skills. This was crucial for women to narrate their stories but also to narrate their stories as truthfully and honestly as possible. This was also established by the interviewer being emotionally engaged with the respondent and allowing respondents to express themselves in ways that they were most comfortable using their own terms of expression, language and terms of reference.

3.4. THE POPULATION AND SAMPLING

A population or universe refers to the large pool of cases which the researcher desires to investigate and to draw conclusions. This however is an abstract concept as one can never truly determine all the elements within a large population (Neuman, 1997:203). To define a population, a researcher specifies the unit being sampled by defining their specific characteristics that is being studied. The only characteristic taken into consideration for this study was that the women had to have terminated their pregnancy. When considering the population which is being investigated, i.e. that of women that have terminated their pregnancy, it is clear that this is an impossibility to measure. This is due to the fact that no registry exists from which we could possibly obtain names and then draw our sample.

Sampling refers to the elements within the population or unit of analysis within the population that reflects the required characteristics of the population that is researched. The aim is to then generalise the findings of the results to the entire population. The aim of this research was to not to make deductions of the reasons that influence women to terminate their pregnancy and also not to generalise to the entire population as has been the case with previous studies. The aim was to identify reasons and sets of reasons and their relationship with, and between each other, that is true to the sample respondents under investigation.

Because of the difficulty in establishing the population, it is therefore impossible to draw a random sample from the population to identify our sample respondents. The starting point to identify respondents was to operationalise our sample, therefore creating a sampling frame. The sampling frame in this research was identified as hospitals or clinics within the Pretoria region that provided abortion services and more importantly, abortion counselling services. Only within this frame, would the researcher have access to women that have terminated their pregnancy. Initially three service providers were identified, Kalafong Hospital, Marie Stopes Clinic and the Reproductive Choices Clinic. The Reproductive Choices Clinic was identified as the ideal based on the fact that abortions were performed on a daily basis, the fact that the researcher was allowed access to the facility and to respondents, the support and assistance from the clinic staff as well as ethical research considerations.

To draw the target sample from the sample framework, a non-probability purposive sampling technique had to be used. Purposive sampling is not based on probability which again underpins the use of qualitative research for the study. The rationale for using purposive sampling is that the units of analysis are difficult-to-reach and is a specialised population. The researcher had to depend on the availability and the consent of respondents to be able to interview them. Once this was obtained, it allowed the researcher to have a more in-depth investigation of the women's stories to gain a better understanding of the women and their circumstances, without affecting the validity of the research. It was also impossible to identify women upfront to include in the interviews as it was only by willing consent and voluntary participation that interviews were conducted once respondents were informed of the aim of the study. Respondents either consented or declined to partake in the research. At the end, twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with women that had decided to terminate their pregnancy and also had followed through with their decision, as the only variable under investigation was the fact that a woman had terminated her pregnancy.

3.5. DATA COLLECTION

3.5.1. ACCESS TO RESPONDENTS

After the sample framework of abortion clinics/hospitals were identified, telephonic arrangements for access to the facilities and respondents were arranged with the person in charge of each of the facilities. An appointment was made to brief the person in charge of the aims of the study and what information the researcher needed to gather. This in turn led to a tour of the facilities as well as an investigation of the process and methods followed for women to terminate their pregnancy.

This information allowed the researcher to establish the process that women follow when opting for an abortion, from the first appointment, pre-abortion counselling, homecare advice and procedures, the actual abortion and the post-abortion counselling. It was also allowed that the researcher be present when an actual termination was performed.

The nature of the study, being very sensitive, and the fact that respondents participation was voluntary, led to the problem of when an interview with the respondents could be done. On ethical grounds, it was not deemed appropriate during the pre-abortion counselling sessions, as this focused on obtaining demographical and medical information. It was also feared that the interview might influence the decision made by the woman during a very emotional period. Due to the fact that a time period exists between the first appointment and pre-abortion counselling session, and the actual date of the termination, women still had the opportunity to change their minds based on a change of personal circumstances. The researcher did not want to influence this in any possible way during the interview process. The second contact with the women was the day that the actual termination occurred, i.e. the day that the abortion was performed. Again, due to ethical considerations, this was deemed inappropriate as this is the most emotional phase during this process. Most women went through emotional grieving once the procedure was completed and this did not allow for voluntary participation and could have negatively influenced the data. The only option was then to interview the women during the post-abortion counselling sessions. Although the grieving process for many was still in progress, the intense, highly emotive stage had passed.

Once this had been established, it led to another ethical dilemma for the researcher. During the process it was discovered that both Kalafong Hospital and the Marie Stopes Clinic did not in actual fact offer post-abortion counselling. During a significant period of time spent at each of these institutions, the researcher deemed it unethical to continue the research at these facilities.

Not only was post-abortion counselling not offered, but the women were not treated with the sensitivity and understanding that is deemed necessary. At Kalafong Hospital, abortions were only performed 14 days after the initial contact due to a back-log of requests. A minimum of 20 women were then taken through the procedure that lasted approximately 10 minutes using the manual vacuum technique. A local anaesthetic is administered but due to the time constraints that the medical staff experience, the abortion procedure was started immediately, thus not allowing the anaesthetic to take effect. This led to the women experiencing both intense physical as well as emotional pain. In no way is the researcher denying the competency of the medical staff, but rather the process of

the abortions performed. Again, this is due to various factors that contribute to this process. At Kalafong Hospital, only one medical doctor and three nursing staff are involved with abortions. Other medical staff at the hospital cannot be forced to participate and to perform abortions as per the Termination of Pregnancy Act no. 92 of 1996. The second reason is due to the volumes of abortions requested and performed proportionate to the number of staff performing this service.

At the Marie Stopes Clinic, it was also found that post-abortion counselling is not offered. Although the volumes are less than at Kalafong Hospital the clinic scrapped the post-abortion counselling sessions based on previous research that indicated that this was not necessary. This curbed access to the respondents as described above. Although involvement and participation from the higher structures at the clinic was excellent, this was not found to be the case at the clinic itself with the medical staff.

The Reproductive Choices Clinic in Midrand, Gauteng, allowed full access of the facilities to the researcher with full co-operation and participation of the staff members. Full post-abortion counselling sessions were offered which then assisted the researcher to gain access to respondents. During observation of the interaction between the staff and the women, it was found that the women were treated with sensitivity and understanding and were not judged by the medical staff. This paved the way for a more stable setting in which the interviews could take place. In contrast to Kalafong Hospital and the Marie Stopes Clinic, the pre-abortion and post-abortion counselling sessions were conducted by a trained and qualified counsellor and not a medical practitioner. The researcher also fully explained the aims of the research and the details surrounding the gathering of data to the staff at the clinic. The semi-structured interview was shared with them as well. A relationship of complete trust and co-operation was established between the researcher and the staff at the clinic. The staff at the clinic also shared their experiences and information gathered during counselling sessions which also provided a better understanding of their dealings with various aspects of terminations.

Due to the full participation and co-operation of the medical staff at the clinic, access to respondents was gained via the post-abortion counselling sessions. During the counselling sessions, the counsellor briefed potential respondents regarding the aim of the research and obtained permission from each individual to become part of the sample. The respondent and the researcher were introduced to each other and a more detailed explanation was given to potential respondents regarding the aim and the interview process, as well as anonymity and confidentiality was agreed upon.

Participation was based on a willing and voluntary basis and many women opted not be part of the research. During February - November 2000 twelve interviews were conducted at the Reproductive Choices Clinic.

3.5.2. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION, ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Participation in the research was completely voluntary and no woman was coerced into being part of the sample. After a detailed explanation as to the aims and objectives to the study during the post-abortion counselling sessions, women were given the choice as of whether or not to participate in the interview.

Their voluntary participation and informed consent of the interview were based on the informed consent statement as set out by Neuman (1997:450):

- A description of the purpose and procedure of the research was verbally discussed with each potential respondent,
- A statement of the risk or discomfort associated with the participation. This was limited to respondents feeling uncomfortable regarding the nature of the study or possibly embarrassed about sharing their personal experience with another person,
- All respondents were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality of records so that no respondent could be identified once the findings were reported,
- The identification of the researcher and of where the information for the questions of the research was found, i.e. the literature review that formed the basis of the study, and
- All respondents were informed that participation is voluntary and can be terminated at any time should they wish to do so.

Of crucial importance is the fact that participation must be voluntary based on an informed decision regarding the information required for the research. Many women refused to participate for various reasons but twelve voluntary participants were interviewed. Voluntary participation was based on ethical considerations toward the respondents as these women are placed in a highly emotive, stressful, and for some, and embarrassing situation. Ethics considered, the interview should by no means aggravate these conditions and be uncomfortable for the person in question.

Anonymity means that the subject remains anonymous or nameless which, due to the nature of the study played a crucial part in obtaining the participation of the respondents.

For reporting the research results, names were changed to alphabetical letters to protect the anonymity of the respondents.

Due to the problems experienced in identifying respondents and their voluntary participation, they will not be identifiable as their identities will not be known to readers. Furthermore, the information gathered, will not link specific individuals to specific responses or stories, thus upholding confidentiality.

3.5.3. THE INTERVIEW

A semi-structured interview was conducted with twelve voluntary respondents. According to Groenewald (1988:44), the aim of the interview is a conversation to collect information. The structured nature of the interview was that specific questions were pre-prepared as to obtain the desired and specific answers required for the study. Also, demographical information regarding the age of the respondent, marital/relationship status, level of education, live children, were also structured. The majority of the information was gathered by probing the details of the responses offered by the respondents to the pre-determined questions. This also allowed the researcher to change direction regarding questions by following-up certain answers to gain a more in-depth understanding or explanation. The interview took the shape of an open and unstructured interview regarding the respondents' narration of their decision to terminate their pregnancy. This was the only way to establish all the reasons that influenced their decision and to gain a better understanding of the relationship between reasons as well as an understanding of their own perceptions of their personal circumstances.

No time frame was established for the interviews upfront as it depended on the woman's narration and which reasons influenced her decision. The majority of the interviews were conducted for approximately 60 minutes although some were significantly shorter and other extended this timeframe.

The interviews were conducted at the Reproductive Choice Clinic in Midrand, Gauteng, in a comfortable lounge and not in an office set-up. This allowed the respondents to be more relaxed and not influenced by medical equipment which could trigger a negative emotion. The respondent and the researcher were seated around a coffee table on the same level so as not to enforce a power imbalance.

The interviews were taped by the researcher with the full consent of the respondent. During the interview, field notes were also taken where applicable, from an observation

perspective of the researcher. Only one respondent refused the use of a tape-recorder and here the researcher had to rely solely on the use of field notes.

This could be ascribed to the respondent's fear of being identified later on, regardless of the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. It must be noted that this could have impacted on some information being lost during the transcribing of the data.

3.6. DATA REDUCTION AND ANALYSIS

3.6.1. INTRODUCTION

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts and field notes to increase the researchers understanding of them to enable to report your discovery to others (Bogdan and Bilken, 1996:155). Most often, the analytical task, interpreting and making sense of the collected information, appears monumental and impossible. Therefore the first step to start in the analysing process is to start with data reduction. Data reduction refers to the process where collected data is reduced to interpretative proportions for the purpose of analysis. Once analysed, the findings can then be presented in a scientific report for the scrutiny of a specific audience that is only interested in a specific phenomenon, as well as for the scrutiny of the reliability of the data (Baily, 1987:332; and Groenewald, 1988:77)

3.6.2. THE TRANSCRIBING OF INTERVIEWS

As already stated, the interviews were recorded on tape in conjunction with taking field notes. The first step in the process of data reduction was to have the interviews transcribed by a professional transcriber into a word document. Once this process was complete, the field notes taken during the interviews as well as the demographical data, were integrated to present a true reflection of the interview.

3.6.3. CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE DATA

The researcher started analysing the data by organising the data into categories on the basis of reasons or sets of reasons identified as themes as well as similarities that were evident. New reasons and the relationship between these reasons were developed and also included for investigation. The themes that become evident were linked to each other in terms of importance and frequency in a single interview and across interviews. As the researcher continued reading the data, new themes and their relationships to each other and within each other were formed, and continuous critical questions were applied to categorising and coding the data.

3.6.4. CODING OF THE DATA

The coding of data occurred by organising the data into conceptual categories and themes were created to use in the analysis. The process is led by the research question which in turn leads to new questions (Neuman,1997:421). Compared to quantitative research, where coding is a clerical task, qualitative coding is an integral part of data analysis. Neuman (1997: 422) states that during this process the researcher is then freed from the details of raw data while encouraging a higher level of thinking regarding the conceptual data. Data coding has a dual purpose, mechanical data reduction and analytical categorisation of data. This is achieved by ordering the data and during this process allows the researcher to retrieve the relevant parts.

3.6.5. ANALYSING OF DATA

According to Neuman (1997:426) the analysis of data means a search for patterns in data. Once a pattern was identified, it was then interpreted in terms of the setting in which it occurred. It thus involves the examining, sorting, categorising, evaluating, comparing and contemplating the coded data as well as constantly reviewing the raw and recorded data.

The analysing of data already started during the coding process. Each interview with the supporting field notes were read in detail. During this first phase, specific focus was placed on the research themes that were identified. The initial reasons were colour coded with coloured highlighters to differentiate between each identified reason. The second phase consisted of a continuous re-reading and evaluation of the identified reasons to establish the correctness of the identified themes, but more importantly to identify new reasons and the relationship between reasons, and to ensure that no data is lost. Of importance is the fact that although a semi-structured interview was conducted, themes were not limited to a specific question but are present throughout the entire transcription as respondent were free to tell their personal story regarding their decision to undergo an abortion and certain reasons were re-visited throughout the interview.

After the initial data reduction, an integration of the data occurred. This process identified the common themes or reasons that were present within, and throughout the different interviews and thus an integration or grouping of these reasons could be done. Although a comparison between women was not the aim of the study, certain similarities came to the foreground which made a limited comparison possible.

The nature of the study as well as the research methodology do not allow for a comprehensive comparison but do allow us greater insight into the relationship between reasons and sets of reasons that influence women's decision regarding whether or not to terminate their pregnancy.

3.7. SUMMARY

The research methodology followed for purposes of this study was fully supportive of the aim of the research project. To achieve the aim of investigating the reasons given by women for choosing to terminate a pregnancy over other alternatives to deal with an unwanted pregnancy, it was decided that a qualitative approach would be the most appropriate. In conjunction with supporting the aim, it was also found that current literature was conducted on a quantitative basis which in turn did not support the aim of the project.

To investigate the reasons that women have for deciding to terminate their pregnancy, a qualitative design was followed to allow for the women to narrate their personal stories framed by their personal experiences and circumstances. Placed within this framework, this was supported by the goals and outcomes of a feminist research methodology which supported the aims by upholding that the world is a web of interconnected human relations. It further allows for interpretations of women to take centre stage and allows for women's personal interpretation of their reality.

Although studies relating to the topic have been conducted as seen in the literature review, the statistical ranking of averages used to indicate primary reasons did not support what was being investigated. No reference was found that allowed women to narrate their own stories and indicate what their personal reasons for terminating a pregnancy was. By assuming that the most frequent stated statistical reason is the most important, does not do justice to women and their voice. A need existed to investigate the reasons given, but more importantly, to investigate potential sets of reasons and the relationship between and within these sets of reasons as well. To be able to investigate these relationships, an exploratory design was followed by making use of a semi-structured interview schedule.

By making use of certain pre-populated questions, it allowed for standardised demographical data to be collected but did not hamper the story-telling process. By allowing respondents to steer the interview, the interview followed the stories in terms of importance to the women as well as to why it was important to them, thus indicating the relationships between reasons.

It was also more interactive and women could relate their experiences and perceptions in more detail as they were not curbed by closed-ended questions. It also allowed for the researcher to delve deeper into certain statements and to clarify the respondent's interpretation of certain themes and concepts.

Although sampling was problematic due to the unavailability of an identifiable population as well as the sensitive nature of the subject, twelve respondents voluntarily engaged in the interviews. The findings from the study are important in terms of reasons not standing in isolation but within a definite relationship, and within sets of reasons, also between different sets of reasons, as well as their influence on each other to lead to a woman deciding to rather terminate her pregnancy rather than to follow an alternate course of action.