CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 provides details on how the empirical investigation that the researcher carried out in the course of this study was done. Therefore, this chapter outlines the following key aspects of the researcher's study: the aim of this study, the research design, data collection and analysis procedures as well as the research ethics that governed the study.

This chapter is laid out as follows:

Figure 6: Layout of Chapter 3

3.2 THE AIM OF THIS STUDY

The overarching aim of this research was to conduct an exploratory, qualitative study in order to investigate the vulnerabilities of teenage mothers and resources that empowered them in order to cope with life. The following objectives guided the researcher's research activities:

- To conduct a literature study in order to understand:

    o the nature and extent of teenage pregnancy and motherhood in schools

    o factors that render teenagers vulnerable to teen pregnancy

- To conduct an empirical research in order to understand:

    o factors that render teenage mothers psychosocially and academically vulnerable to poor developmental outcomes

    o the resilience phenomenon among teenage mothers

    o the mechanisms that they used to cope with their lives

Whether these objectives were achieved, will become clear in Chapter 5.

3.3 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

As indicated in Chapter 1, this study involved a literature review as well as empirical research. In this regard, the researcher conducted a literature study in order to contextualise her study and an empirical study in which she used symbolic drawings and semi-structured interviews to collect data. She focused on the experiences of teenage mothers, hoping to be able to provide a description of the essence of their experiences (Creswell, 2009:13; De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2010:270). The aim was to transform lived experiences into a description of its essence in such a way that it became something meaningful (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:26). The next section describes the data collection procedure in detail.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

As pointed out, data collection occurred in two phases in which the researcher interviewed ten teenage mothers and asked each one of them to make symbolic drawings too. The researcher elaborates on how she collected the data below.

3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

In semi-structured interviews, the researcher had a list of questions, an interview guide (Appendix D) that guided the interviews. She developed an interview guide after doing a literature review. Additional questions were posed to the interviewees in order to get more clarity on their responses. She followed the suggestion by Nieuwenhuis (2010:87) that it was important to be attentive to the responses of the participants so that she could identify new emerging lines of enquiry that were directly related to teen motherhood and the factors that contributed to vulnerability and empowerment. After the researcher had introduced herself to each participant, she explained the purpose of the study.

On average, each interview lasted for one hour. These semi-structured interviews were recorded. The researcher interviewed all ten participants individually. She interviewed the participants in English, but she had to translate other words into Sesotho where participants could not understand. The participants were given an opportunity to respond in their own languages where they could not express themselves in English. All participants were Sesotho-speaking. All the participants were interviewed at their various schools after class time.

There were no disturbances during the interviews since the researcher intentionally chose locations in the school where there would be no distractions. The participants were from five high schools, all in the Fezile Dabi District. The interview schedule included questions on the support that participants get from their families, communities, schools and their friends. The participants were interviewed once; the amount of information obtained was not enough and so the researcher had to get more information from them by means of drawings.

3.4.2 Symbolic drawings and narratives

In this phase, participants were asked to draw anything that they could think of that symbolised a source of strength. Then they had to explain in four to five sentences what the drawing was about. The Draw-and-write technique was preferred in this research because it is considered non-threatening to children as almost all school children are familiar with producing drawings and writing about themselves (Horstman, Aldiss, Richardson & Gibson, 2008). The researcher understood the girls' cultures as she grew up under the same situations, in the township. Furthermore, African children are in some instances socialised in ways that make it difficult for them to discuss matters of sexuality. The researcher considered drawings to be less intrusive and less threatening to the participants.

The researcher briefly prepared a drawing brief in English. She provided the participants with the material for the drawings, such as pencils and erasers. The participants took about forty-five minutes to complete the drawings in a classroom with tables and chairs. The researcher briefly read the drawing and explained what they were expected to do and added that they could write their narratives in any language.

The researcher explained that those who could have problems relating to writing could dictate to her so that she could write the narratives on their behalf. She explained that, in this case, she would write the narrative and read it back to the teenage mother for verification. She gave them time to ask if they did not understand. The narratives were all written in English and all participants wrote their own narratives that they did not request the researcher to write on their behalf.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

3.5.1 Analysing symbolic drawings and narratives

The researcher looked carefully at the drawings and grouped them according to the themes. For example, the drawings were grouped according to the following themes:

- teenage mothers enjoyed family support (Figures 1 & 2)

- teenage mothers had dreams for the future (Figures 3, 4 & 5),

- teenage mothers were anchored in religion and spirituality (Figures 6, 7 & 8)

- teenage mothers had determination (Figure 9)

- teen mothers had abilities to learn from mistakes (Figures 10)

In order to achieve this, the content of the drawings were analysed focussing on how they coped and on general themes as in their narratives (Kortesluoma, Punamaki & Nikkonen, 2008:219). The researcher also searched for recurring words, phrases and patterns in the narratives that accompanied the drawings (Patton, 2002).

3.5.2 Analysis of interviews

Content analysis was used in analysing data from the interviews. Content analysis is defined by Nieuwenhuis (2010:101) as a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis that identifies and summarises content. The analysis of interviews involved a process of looking at the data collected by means of interviews, from different angles, with a view to identifying key terms and phrases in the text that helped the researcher in the understanding and interpretation of the raw data.

The researcher had read through all the data in order to obtain a general sense of the information and reflected on its overall meaning. She started recording general thoughts about the data and writing notes in the margins. She started a detailed analysis with a coding process. According to Creswell (2009:186), coding is the process of organising the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning into information.

It involves taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences or paragraphs or images into categories and labelling those categories with a term or a phrase. There are three types of coding, namely open, axial and selective coding. Open coding involves exploring the data and identifying units of analysis to code for meanings, feelings, actions and events. Axial coding seeks to make links between categories and codes around the axis (Cohen *et al.*, 2005:346). The essence of axial coding is the interconnectedness of categories. Selective coding involves identifying a core code; the relationship between that core code and other codes is made clear and

the coding scheme is compared with the pre-existing theory (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:493).

In this research, open and axial coding were used. The researcher wrote codes (single words/phrases) in the margins. After reading through all transcripts, she made a list of all the codes and then clustered similar topics into categories. The aim of grouping the data was to reduce the number of categories by collapsing those that are similar or dissimilar into broader, higher order categories. The researcher avoided using predetermined themes; therefore, she developed themes from the data itself.

According to Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:211), theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research. Themes can be described as umbrella constructs that are usually identified by the researcher before, after, and during the data collection process. The following techniques were used in identifying themes in this research (De Vos *et al.*, 2005:86):

- word analysis (key words)
- reading of larger units (comparing and contrasting material and searching for missing information)
- intentional analysis of linguistic features (metaphors, transitions and connectors)
- the physical manipulation of text (unmarked text, pawing and cut and sort procedures)

The researcher triangulated the data from interviews, drawings and narratives. According to Creswell (1994:174), the concept of triangulation is based on the assumption that any bias inherent in a particular data source, investigator and method, would be neutralised when used in conjunction with other data sources. De Vos *et al.* (2005:361) define triangulation in qualitative research as the convergence of multiple perspectives that can provide greater confidence that what is being targeted is being accurately captured. Triangulation in this research entailed comparing data sets and identifying similarities and dissimilarities. Data from drawings, narratives and interviews, were analysed and compared. Triangulation helped the researcher to better understand

teenage motherhood and factors leading to their vulnerability and empowerment by approaching it from different angles.

3.6 RESEARCH PARADIGM

An interpretivist paradigm was used in this research. Paradigms according to Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2007:6), are all encompassing systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define for researchers the nature of their enquiry. They act as perspectives that provide a rationale for the research and commit the researcher to particular methods of data collection and interpretation. The paradigm that the researcher followed is fully explained in Chapter 1.

3.7 RESEARCH ETHICS

Permission was obtained from the Provincial Department of Education in Bloemfontein. The researcher filled in a form downloaded from the internet in order to request permission to conduct research in schools, in the Fezile Dabi District. She personally went to the chosen schools to ask for permission from the principals. She had to produce the letter that gave her permission, from the Education Department, to each school. The gatekeepers in this research were principals and class educators of learners in Grades 9 to 11. Principals, parents and learners gave consent before the researcher could start with the empirical research. Consent forms were signed by all participants, and their parents and caregivers co-signed them. The researcher personally explained to them in Southern Sotho what the research was about and what the intention of the study was.

All participants were assured of confidentiality. The information was kept confidential and whatever they said was only used for this research. Participants' names are not revealed in this research, instead pseudonyms are used. Schools are identified as School A, B, C and D and the participants as: 8 – Tshidi, 9 – Leti, 10 – Sannah, 11 – Tsatsi, 12 – Banana, 13 – Kete, 14 – Lebu, 15 – Jene, 16 – Brenda and 17 – Joy. All participants were told that their participation is voluntary, and they could opt out at any time they felt uncomfortable.

Participants were debriefed after interviews were conducted. The interviewer gave them a general idea of what she was investigating. She asked them if they had any questions. They asked a few questions, and she answered them honestly and as fully as possible.

3.8 CONCLUSION

Chapter 3 re-visited the design and methods that were used to collect data. The next chapter focuses on the analysis and interpretation of data collected by means of interviews, drawings and narratives, as indicated in this chapter.