

Chapter Three

Methodology

This dissertation chapter is concerned with the research design guiding this dissertation and all the methods employed to complete the project. The features of the design and each of the methods will be described based on relevant research literature. The rationale for the design and each of the methods will be provided, including their limitations where necessary.

Research Design

This dissertation is based on the qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research is ‘multimethod in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p.2). It is different from the quantitative research paradigm in different ways. Firstly, it draws on linguistic type of data while its quantitative counterpart draws on statistical data (Atieno, 2009). Secondly, it draws on theoretical frameworks that are different from those employed by the quantitative research method (Hoepfl, 1997). Qualitative research is mostly concerned with meaning-making (Smith, 2015). In other words, it aims to understand how people interpret events around them and the meanings they attach to these events. It pays attention to subjective experiences of people (Smith, 2015). The ‘essence of qualitative research is to make sense of and recognize patterns among words in order to build up a meaningful picture without compromising its richness and dimensionality’ (Leung, 2015, p.324). It seeks answers to questions relating to why, how, where and when something occurs with the aim of building a new theory or refuting an existing theory on the phenomenon (Leung, 2015).

This current dissertation adopts qualitative research because of the nature of questions the researcher is interested in answering, which are connected to ‘why’ and ‘how’ the teenagers

studied in this project chose engage in binge drinking. As qualitative research is exploratory (Einarsen et al., 1994), it is the suitable research method capable of exploring this social problem. The quantitative research method is concerned with measurements as previously noted, therefore, not suitable for this current research considering the exploratory nature of this study. The aim was to ‘explore’ the views of teenagers who had engaged in binge drinking and not to measure how much they drank and this made the qualitative research paradigm the suitable method.

Although qualitative research is considered suitable for the current project, there are also notable limitations of this particular research paradigm. A popular one is its lack of generalisability. This comes about due to the focus of the qualitative research paradigm on subjective experiences of individual participants from closed group (Leung, 2015). This means that the experiences might be peculiar to the particular individuals and probably few others who have had that same kind of experiences, thus, such subjective experiences cannot be generalised to the wider population. Despite this shortcoming, qualitative method is still considered as the suitable method for collecting the type of data needed to be able to address the aims of this current study. As previously demonstrated, the quantitative method is never an option due to its focus on measurements.

Sampling

This study is based on purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is defined as an ‘intentional selection of informants based on their ability to elucidate a specific theme, concept, or phenomenon’ (Robinson, 2014). This definition guided the selection of the participants in this study. The participants were teenagers who have engaged in binge drinking alongside their peers. The participants were 16 in number and were selected based on the knowledge that they had engaged in binge drinking alongside their peers. Screening questions were designed to

ensure than any teenagers who had not engaged in binge drinking were automatically screened out even if they showed interest in the study because they were not considered to have the knowledge the researcher was interested in exploring. Only binge drinkers were expected to have first-hand knowledge of the impacts of binge drinking which the researcher aimed to explore.

Data Collection

Primary data is chosen for this study. Primary data is defined as ‘data that are collected for the specific research problem at hand, using procedures that fit the research problem best’ (Hox and Boeije, 2005, p.593). For this reason, primary data was collected for this research project because it enables researcher to address the research aims more adequately. The advantage of this is that the researcher was able to design the interview questions as he deemed necessary to be able to address his research aims and also recruited participants whom he believed had the necessary experiences needed to gain insights into the issue.

Qualitative research can be completed with data in the form of life story, case study, visual text, observation, interview and more (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Interviews are of different types, namely, unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews (Longhurst, 2016). Each of this suits a particular type of qualitative research. Semi-structured interview is considered as the most suitable for this current research. Semi-structured interview ‘employs a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions’ (Adams, 2015, p.492). As Smith et al. (2009) have observed, semi-structured interview enables the researcher to engage in a dialogue with his/her participant and to amend his/her first set of questions as the participant provides new insights into the phenomenon.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the current data was done via interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA belongs to the family of analytic methods collectively referred to as ‘phenomenology’ (Smith, 2004). It seeks to understand the particular type of experiences that matter to people (Smith et al., 2009). It is concerned with lived experiences which are then connected to psychological issues.

The choice of IPA in this study is due to its focus on subjective experiences. As previously stated, the current participants were binge drinkers. Thus, such experience is personal and each individual could only describe why and how it impacted on him/her. These personal experiences are connected to psychological problems suffered by the binge drinkers, such as sleeping problems and poor attention to details which are discussed in Chapter Four based on the primary data collected from the participants. Thus, the experiences of these binge drinkers are a kind of lived experience which IPA is often interested in exploring. Therefore, no other analytic method could have been more suitable than IPA for this current study.

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