

## METHOD

## **STUDY DESIGN**

This chapter explains how the research questions were investigated and why particular methods and techniques were employed. A description of the context of the study is given, followed by the profile of the research participants, information on the data collection process, and how the data was analyzed.

The study was descriptive-qualitative in nature with a “focused” ethnographic approach that ‘aims at certain elements of knowledge (of a phenomenon in a society) relevant to the topic on which the study focuses’ (Knoblauch, 2005). As the name indicates, the research strategy is “focused” on intensive data collection and data analysis of a specific process during the field visit.

### **The Context of the Study**

The study was conducted in the National Capital Region (NCR) concentrating on central and western parts of Delhi. Delhi, one of the most historic capitals in the world, is spread over an area of 1483 sq. kms accommodating 13.8 million people. Delhi has a multi cultural environment with a blend of tradition and modernity. Cultural diversity and religious unity are the core values of Delhi, as it is a home to a highly diverse population. It is a metropolitan city with a cosmopolitan outlook that still reflects the shadows of its glorious past.

### **Research Participants**

Thirty-five married women were interviewed. The women were purposively selected ensuring that they met the criterion of higher education in that they possessed graduate degrees. An attempt was made to include women with varied educational backgrounds

such as business administration, medicine, mass communication, accountancy, liberal arts and social science.

Hindu women belonging to middle upper-middle class, married for at least one year and staying in a joint family, and with no children yet were included in the research. The period of one year of marriage was decided based on the assumption that some integration with the new marital family would have occurred, and women may be able to reflect on the process of identity development after marriage.

Marriage and motherhood are considered as two important aspects of a woman's identity. The present study focused on the event of marriage and the associated changes in a woman's life. Women with no children were selected to avoid the influence of the status of motherhood on the identity of women.

#### **Tool for Data Collection**

As the study involved understanding identity development of women, it was necessary to take into account the subjective importance of self experience, which mostly the readymade, narrowly focused research instruments fail to account for (Hausser, cited in Kraus, 2000). Hence, an open-ended interview guideline was prepared that helped the researcher to engage in free-flowing interaction with the women. It helped to provide an insightful understanding of the perspectives of the other and the meaning of the other's experiences. A few broad questions were posed to the women with subsequent probes wherever required. Wherever necessary, clarifications were made.

The interview guideline was pilot tested with two respondents to check for the comprehensibility and reliability. A few questions were reformulated and reorganized to

ensure clear understanding and flow of the interview. A list of suggested probe questions was prepared, however they varied depending on the responses of the women.

The interview guideline consisted of four major components:

- (i) Background information about the participants such as age, duration of marriage, educational qualifications, composition of family and employment status
- (ii) Section on education included questions such as reasons for pursuing higher education, milieu during higher education, influence of education on identity, perception of husband and family members about women's education
- (iii) Section on marriage included questions about the process of selecting a partner, ideas about marriage, changes in identity after marriage, adjustments after marriage, emotional consequences and coping mechanisms
- (iv) The final section included questions on the perceived impact of changes in identity due to higher education on married life and aspects of self such as most important person in one's life.

Refer to Appendix A for the interview guideline.

### **Procedure for Data Collection**

The researcher first contacted a few women known to her in Delhi city. Through the snow ball technique participants for the study were located. The women were contacted on phone and the purpose of research was explained to them and their consent to participate in the study was obtained. An appointment for interview was fixed with each woman, who expressed willingness to participate in the study. Sometimes it took almost a month between the time a woman was contacted for first time and the actual interview.

The employed women had a hectic schedule and it was difficult to find a convenient time for the interview. The detailed interview was conducted in the woman's home or any other place (such as their work place or restaurant) convenient to both, woman and interviewer (with minimum outside interruption). Some women were unwilling to give the interview at home as they were hesitant to talk about their marital life in the presence of in-laws and suspected interference of their in-laws. Therefore, the interview was either conducted in office (in case of employed women) or a restaurant or a park. Being of similar age and life stage the researcher could establish good rapport and a level of comfort with the women. In addition, women who had conducted research as part of their courses during higher education were able to better understand the purpose of the present study and were willing to share detailed information. Below is an excerpt from an interview:

Researcher: Can you give me some instance, when you say that things have changed after coming here (at in-law's home)?

Participant: You are not quoting me... people should not come to hear about it.

Researcher: Not at all. The information will remain confidential. It will be used only for research purpose.

Participant: I realize the importance of research that's why I am being so honest. I myself have done some surveys, not your kind of research.

Interviews were mostly conducted in English, except in a few cases where women shared information both in English and Hindi. Each interview took an average of 2-2 ½ hours, with the duration ranging from 1 ½ to four hours, depending on the openness of the women and the experiences recalled. The interview was tape recorded and transcribed on

the same day. If any information was missing or more clarification was required, the woman was contacted again. Follow-up interview was conducted mostly using a speakerphone, where the interviewer took detailed notes of the responses.

Pseudonyms have been used in the results.

### **Ensuring Validity**

Ensuring validity is a key component of qualitative research (Maxwell, 1996). Various 'carefully planned' steps at the time of data collection and analysis ensured avoidance of validity threats to a great extent in the present study.

All the interviews were audio taped, with the permission of the women participating in the study, and transcribed later. Audio taping interviews provided accurate and complete information. While transcribing if there was any specific phrase that was unclear or any theme that needed more information, the woman was contacted over the phone. Every care was taken to ensure that the meaning attached to those phrases was interpreted in the same way as the woman. No assumptions about the meanings of words were made in such cases.

The women were made comfortable during the interview. The interview usually began with some informal questions about the process of selecting marriage partner. It was like nostalgia for the women to recollect and share their experience of getting married. During the interview, interviewer had to be alert to make sure that the woman reflected on her identity patterns. Care was taken to ensure that no leading questions were asked. All the interviews were conducted by the researcher herself which enabled consistency in the probe questions asked.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed both formally and informally (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Informal data analysis occurred on a continuous basis during the time the data was collected. As the researcher reviewed each transcribed interview, she made notes. Considering the length of interviews, data reduction charts were prepared to get a summary of the interview (Refer Appendix B for an example of data reduction chart).

Qualitative data was analyzed through coding, clustering and the writing of memos.

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe codes as “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p.56).

Coding involved sorting through data and attaching short words or phrases to data that were related in some way. For example, based on the objectives of the study, the following codes were developed to label the data:

Re-edu: Reasons for pursuing higher education

Ch-edu: Changes in identity after higher education

Ch-mar: Changes in identity after marriage

Cpy: Copying mechanisms

Emo: Emotional consequences

After assigning codes in each interview, a list of responses for each variable was separated. For instance, an exhaustive list of all the coded responses for changes in identity after marriage was prepared. Then the similar responses were clustered together.

Clustering is a process of grouping similar patterns and characteristics and then conceptualizing into categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.249).

To complement codes, memos were used. A memo is a write-up of ideas about codes, definitions of the codes, and connections among codes as they strike the researcher while coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.72). Memos were a sentence, a paragraph, or even a few pages. They were conceptual in intent in that they bound together different pieces of data into a recognizable cluster to show a general theme. Strauss (1987) defines theoretical memos as "writing in which the researcher puts down theoretical questions, hypothesis, summary of codes etc. - a method of keeping track of coding results and stimulating further coding, and also as a major means of integrating theory" (p.22). After reading through all the generated notes a number of times, salient themes emerged that are discussed under the sub-headings in the chapter on results and discussion. For example, while analyzing the responses of women related to the changes in identity after marriage, two broad themes emerged, namely, changes within self and self-in-relation with others. These two broad themes were further divided into sub themes. For instance, changes within self included sub themes such as responsibility, role associated thinking and behavior.

In order to elicit the emerging linkages between higher education, married life and identity of women, a conceptually clustered matrix was created. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the basic principle of conceptually clustered matrix is the conceptual coherence in the rows and columns that are arranged in a way to bring together items that 'belong together' (p.127-128). In the present study, rows listed the respondents with their educational degree and columns included variables such as reasons for pursuing higher education, changed in identity due to higher education, influence of these changes on the married life of women and the perception of husband and other family members about



women's education. The matrix provided a ready profile of each participant and facilitated making comparisons between different variables and thus evidently displaying the emerging linkages between the variables.