Chapter 3

Method

This section describes the research methodology adopted to fulfil the objectives of the research. It includes the participants (the sampling procedure and framework), the tools used, the research design, method and procedure for data collection, validation procedures, data analysis and ethical considerations for the study.

Participants

The sampling framework for the present study was developed using the World Health Organization (2002) determinants of active ageing, namely economic, social and physical environment and personal and behavioural characteristics.

The participants for this study were older adults who were between 70 and 80 years of age, who had retired from active employment and were currently not in any paid employment. They were men and women who belonged to the middle socio-economic status with a monthly family income ranging between Rs. 18,498 to 36,996. The researcher referred to Kuppuswamy’s socio-economic status scale for the year 2014 (Oberoi, 2015). The family income was calculated based on the income of the participant, family member and his/her spouse. With reference to religion, the participants were older adults who belonged to Hindu, Christian and Muslim religions. The cultural background included participants who were natives of Bangalore city and older adults from other states of India residing in Bangalore. Participants were those who have lost a spouse at least a year ago, either divorced or had expired and were presently living with their family members. Residing with family facilitated a familiar environment with less structure and minimum restrictions. Participants were those who did not have a significant physical illness or any psychiatric illness and could take care of their basic requirements and personal needs. Participants were older
adults who spoke English and had completed their tenth standard, as education would enhance their metacognition, which would, in turn, influence their thinking and experiences. Those older adults who could express themselves adequately and had retrospective memory were a priority in order to be able to reflect on their past experiences.

The MMSE was the assessment tool used to evaluate the mental state of the participants (refer Appendix C for MMSE assessment tool). It focused on signs of cognitive impairment, dementia and assessed the daily functioning of the older adults (Folstein, Folstein, & McHugh, 1975).

The number of participants for the study was 14 older adults and this was determined based on ‘saturation’. Saturation was the point at which no more relevant or additional information was observed in the data and there were no gaps in the data collected (Mason, 2010). Since the researcher reached saturation after 14 clients, data collection was terminated.

**Research Design**

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study as the researcher found the approach appropriate to understand in-depth, the life experiences of older adults that facilitate the development of PsyCap, the challenges faced by them and the strategies they adopt to cope with the changes that occur in the process of development of PsyCap. Creswell (2003) explains qualitative research as ‘a qualitative approach is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives or participatory perspectives or both. It also uses strategies of inquiry such as narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, or case studies. The researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data’.
Sampling Procedure

For this study older adults were approached using purposive sampling where participants were selected based on the predetermined criteria related to the research objectives. The researcher also used snowball sampling, where the participants’ social networks were used to identify other participants (Cresswell, 2007; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2010).

The data collection method used was a semi structured interview guide.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher constructed the semi structured interview guide by reviewing literature, interviewing experts in the field of gerontology and older adults were met informally to get appropriate questions for the interview guide. The past experience of the researcher in dealing with older adults was also utilised.

The researcher specially focused on the experiences of older adults, with an emphasis on how they made sense of the ageing process, the psychological capital acquired by them in the process of ageing and the factors that helped and hindered their adjustment and coping. A semi structured interview guide was used to guarantee a naturally-flowing conversation and at the same time, ensure the focus and direction of the interview (refer Appendix D for interview guide).

Face validity of the semi structured interview guide was ascertained by ten professionals in the field. Experts were chosen based on their expertise in the field and their interaction with older adults. Most of them were academicians who hold a doctorate degree in psychology with at least five years of experience in teaching and guiding research scholars, and a few others were working in non-governmental organisations. The experts were asked to assess the appropriateness of the questions,
the suitability of language used and to review the cultural and ethical correctness of
the schedule.

Procedure for Data Collection

Names and contact numbers of older adults known to the researcher were
noted. They were initially contacted over the telephone, briefed about the research and
were requested to be participants. The researcher conducted the interviews at the
residences of the participants at a time and date convenient to each of them; and when
they were alone at home to ensure that they had the freedom to share their experiences
without restrictions. They were given a brief write up which gave them information
about the researcher and the research. This was followed by an introduction on
psychological capital and its relevance to older adults; the purpose of the study and
researcher contact information. Finally, the participants were asked to sign a
certificate of consent (refer Appendix A for consent form). Demographic details and
socio-economic background of each participant were noted down (refer Appendix B
for demographic details form). During the first meeting with the older adults, the
MMSE (Folstein, Folstein, & McHugh, 1975) was used to decipher and rule out any
mental illness. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. The
participants were also given a diary to note down points or reflections that they
thought of after the interview. These reflections were used during analysis and
formation of themes. The participants were assured of confidentiality and guaranteed
the anonymity of their identifying information. They were also reassured that the data
would be used only for the purpose of the study and that they would be contacted
again for any clarifications during the process of interpretation and analysis.

In-depth personal interviews were conducted over two to three sessions and
each lasted for about 90 to 120 minutes.
Data Analysis

Phenomenological research usually generates a large quantity of interview notes, tape recordings and observations which have to be analyzed. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyze the data. The emphasis was on the older adults’ abilities to reflect and give meaning to their lives and each participant’s transcript was treated as an idiographic account of the participant. Interview notes, tape recordings, observations and journals maintained by the participants were also used for analysis (Cresswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The researcher’s ‘first impressions’ which were the initial spontaneous insights from the data, were noted down. To some extent this prevented the researcher’s biases from interfering with the formation of codes and themes during analysis. The first impressions were referred to later during the formation of themes (Churchill, 2000).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) proposed by philosopher Edmund Husserl was used to analyze the interviews with older adults. IPA has been used for this study to explore in detail the way in which older adults made sense of the ageing process, their joys, struggles and coping strategies; to recognize the psychological capital acquired by them in the ageing process and to investigate the factors that facilitated and hindered their coping and adjustment.

IPA believes that participants are meaning making individuals, immersed in their cultural, linguistic and physical world and the researcher tried to make sense of the lived experiences of the participants as they experience it. The researcher listened carefully to the personal experiences of older adults as they expressed their thoughts and feelings through a detailed narration of their stories, in their own words; and this will help in altering pre-conceived notions about older adults (Smith et al., 2010).
The analysis was carried out using the guidelines given by Smith et al. (2010). Each transcript was read in detail and the researcher noted down anything of interest and importance within the transcript. The researcher focused on the language used by the participants, reflected on the context of their experiences and concerns and recognized abstract concepts. All these together helped identify the patterns that gave meaning to participant accounts of their lived experiences. The initial analysis was done in three levels. Firstly, the ‘descriptive comments’ focused and analyzed the content of what the participant had shared within the transcript. The second was the ‘linguistic comments’ which explored the specific language used by the participant and lastly, the ‘conceptual comments’ focused on interrogating the data and analysis was more at a conceptual level.

Patterns or codes were then identified and the codes from each transcript were then compared and contrasted to identify common themes across multiple participants in the study. These clustered codes were given a category title, and this became the emergent themes. A more interpretative description was developed between the coded data and the researcher’s psychological understanding of what these themes would mean for the participants. A structure was then developed to establish the relationships between themes. The emergent themes were then further clustered into super-ordinate themes.

The data was organised in such a way so as to enable easy access of transcripts during analysis, right from the initial comments, clustering and development of themes. The results of the Interpretative phenomenological analysis were presented as three super-ordinate themes that were common to the participants of the study. These themes were further divided into emergent themes. Finally, all themes were analysed based on the researcher’s experience and interpretation. This was
substantiated by verbatim extracts from the original texts of the participant interviews, research studies and existing theories.

Validation

Supervision was done to validate the research study and to support the credibility of the findings and interpretation of results. The researcher maintained a reflective journal for each participant. It included the researcher’s observations from the field and reflections of thoughts, opinions and feelings experienced during and after each interview with the participants. This was done to bracket off any personal biases and it was also used during analysis of transcripts and writing the results.

The researcher also had regular discussions with the research supervisor about the processes of data analysis. In addition to this, the researcher had an independent coder to ensure the credibility of themes, so the chances of bias were reduced. After the themes were generated and analysis was written up, the participants were contacted to check if there was an appropriate interpretation of their experiences and formulation of themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Before analysis of the data the iteration process was carried out by the researcher. This is a process where after transcribing the data the researcher looked for gaps and when clarifications were needed, the participants were met again. The transcripts were read to them and clarifications were made; they were also encouraged to add additional information to the interviews. (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Triangulation

Triangulation was done to test the plausibility and coherence of the interpretations made by the researcher. The credibility of the themes that had been identified by the researcher was determined by having an independent coder. The
transcribed interviews were coded by the researcher and an independent coder. An inter-rater agreement for the themes was established using kappa statistic. The agreement was found to be 85% (a score above 0.6 or 60% is considered to be a good level of agreement) (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The researcher then proceeded with identifying themes and developed the final list of themes starting with each case and moving onto cross case analysis. When the theme generation was being done and the coding framework was developed the participants were contacted to ensure that their experiences have been accurately represented by the researcher (Cresswell, 2007; Dallos & Vetere, 2005).

**Ethical Considerations**

Older adults who were part of this study were informed that their participation was voluntary; they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and that they would not be put to any inconvenience. They were asked to sign a consent form and were also given adequate information about the research study and contact details of the researcher. They were also informed that they had the freedom to withdraw their participation from the study at any time if they felt compelled to do so. Participants were debriefed and during member check they were asked to validate the codes. The older adults were offered psychological counselling services by the researcher who is a professional counsellor, if needed during or after the interviews. They would also have access to their own transcripts and results of the study (ICMR, 2006; APA, 2014).