

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This study aims to explore ethical dilemmas, ethical decision making, and outcomes of ethical decision making in nursing administration of head nurses in regional hospitals of Southern Thailand through critical incident analysis.

#### *Research Design*

In this study, five stages of critical incident analysis, proposed by Flanagan (1954), were processed by the researcher as follows:

##### **Stage 1:** Establishing the general aim of the activity

Establishing the general aim of the activity is very important because it is central to the interview guidelines (Norman et al, 1992). In this study, the main objective is to explore ethical dilemmas, ethical decision making, and outcomes of ethical decision making in nursing administration of head nurses in regional hospitals, Southern Thailand. The aim of the activity of head nurses was defined as “the way of thinking and acting when faced with ethical dilemmas in the administrative arena”.

##### **Stage 2:** Setting plans and specifications

The next stage of the critical incident process is setting plans and specifications which involve addressing the issues of who should be the respondent, which situation should be observed and which activity should be noted (Cox, et al., 1993).

### Participants and setting

The participants in this study were 53 head nurses who had been working in five regional hospitals of Southern Thailand. Participants were recruited purposively based on the identified criteria: 1) possessing at least 1 year experience as head nurse, and 2) having experienced ethical dilemmas and ethical decision making in nursing administration.

### Sample size

In critical incident analysis study, sample size is based on the number of incidents that are collected rather than the number of participants (Kemppainen, 2000). According to Flanagan (1954), it may be satisfactory to collect 50 or 100 incidents if the activity or job being defined is relatively simple. To ensure the number of incidents proposed by Flanagan (1954), the researcher collected incidents from 53 participants.

### **Stage 3: Collecting information**

In critical incident analysis, incidents can be collected by direct observation and retrospective accounts. In this study, individual interview was used in collecting the information.

#### 3.1 Data collecting tool

Data collecting tools in this study consisted of the Demographic Data Form and the Individual Interview Guide.

The Demographic Data Form was designed by the researcher to collect data regarding participants' demographic data including age, gender, religion, educational level, area of work, years of experience as a nurse, years of administrative experience as a head nurse, ethics courses attended, and ethics conferences attended.

The Individual Interview Guide was designed by the researcher to

collect data regarding ethical dilemmas, ethical decision making, and outcomes of ethical decision making in nursing administration of head nurses. It consisted of four open-ended questions regarding ethical dilemmas, ethical decision making, and outcomes of ethical decision making from critical incidents they experienced in nursing administration.

### 3.2 Validity of data collecting tool

In critical incident analysis, the most crucial aspects of the data collection procedure are the questions because many studies have shown that a slight change in wording may produce a substantial change in the incidents reported (Flanagan, 1954). In this study, content validity of the Individual Interview Guide was approved by three experts in ethics. Suggestions from these experts were incorporated into the final revision of the data collecting tool. It was then tried out with 3 head nurses in a similar setting who were not involved in this study.

### 3.3 Data collection procedures

Data was collected after permission of the institutional review board, Faculty of Nursing, Prince of Songkla University. The data collection procedure consisted of two phases: the preparation phase and the collection phase.

#### 3.3.1 Preparation phase

1) Letters requesting collaboration from the directors of regional hospitals in Southern Thailand in data collection was obtained from the Dean of Faculty of Nursing, Prince of Songkla University. Letters explaining the objectives, procedures, and expected outcomes of the study together with the instruments were sent to the directors of hospitals.

2) The researcher informed the nursing directors of the regional hospitals in Southern Thailand by a letter concerning the research objectives

and asked for permission to collect data from participants.

### 3.3.2 Collection phase

1) The participants were purposively selected and contacted to interview.

2) The researcher explained the purpose, procedures, and benefits of the individual interview. The participants were asked if they were willing to participate in the interviews which were tape recorded. They were informed of the security of information and the freedom to participate and/or to withdraw from the study at any time.

3) All interviews were conducted in places and times chosen by the participants.

4) After receiving a consent form, each participant was interviewed by the researcher. The interviews were guided by the Individual Interview Guide.

#### **Stage 4: Analyzing the information**

Analyzing the information utilizing the critical incident analysis approach takes the form of inductive classification of the information and the construction of a hierarchy of categories which enables the information to be described at increasing levels of specificity (Norman, et al., 1992).

In this study, interview data were recorded and transcribed verbatim into written text. The categories varied according to the purpose of the study. The researcher developed the main and sub-themes of ethical dilemmas, ethical decision making, and outcomes of ethical decision making. Then critical incidents in nursing administration, themes and sub-themes of ethical dilemmas, ethical decision making, and outcomes of ethical decision making were described in both frequency and

percentage.

#### **Stage 5: Interpreting and reporting the findings**

Themes and sub-themes of ethical dilemmas, ethical decision making, and outcomes of ethical decision making were interpreted based on information described by participants. The linkage of ethical dilemmas, ethical decision making, and outcomes of ethical decision making were reported.

#### **Protection of human rights**

This study was conducted conscientiously protecting the human rights of all participants. The research proposal and instruments were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Faculty of Nursing, Prince of Songkla University. Prior to data collection, consent was obtained in order to ensure the protection of human rights. The individual interviews took place where the participants felt comfortable. The security of the data during the study was maintained with only the researcher and advisors able to access the data for the purpose of the study. Anonymity was maintained for each transcription.