



DATA ANALYSIS

Discourse analysis was used to interpret the data. A range of discursive themes emerged from transcriptions of the interviews, which spoke to the aims of the study. For the academic reader with an interest in methodological issues, Appendix B provides some insight into the way in which the following interpretations were reached. The reason for including this rather long and detailed appendix is that the “scientific” status of qualitative research is often challenged, which is rarely the case when statistics are presented.

It is necessary, however, to make some remarks here about the key methodological assumptions made in discourse analysis, through which a particular, but not exclusive, “sense” is made of the individual responses of the interviewees. The first point is that discourses are essentially relational; they set up meanings through the relationships they create between their different individual components and through excluding or suppressing a range of alternative meanings or interpretations.

The second assumption is that individual utterances are not entirely self-initiated or “created” but rather activate pre-existing discourses, sometimes bringing elements into new combinations that generate new meanings. In this study, the interviewees are understood to be speaking within already constructed, active discourses, the terms of which they deploy to interpret and make sense of their own experiences and actions or decisions. These discourses usually operate with a certain internal coherence and set parameters on the meanings that can be produced by foregrounding particular interpretations of phenomena and excluding others.

The discourse analyst engages in a second level of interpretation by relocating these individual utterances within the fields of meaning of

the broader social and historical discourses from which they have been generated, and where possible, identifying the silences, exclusions and lacunae that are a necessary part of constructing particular meanings.