

Research Methods in Health Promotion
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Lecture 23: Qualitative Methods in Health Promotion (Part III)

As we progress towards understanding qualitative methods in health promotion as part of research methodologies, we would now go through the different methods of data collection. The concepts covered in this session would be the basic process of interview, its designs, procedures, protocols and of course as we all know the very basic types of interview used in qualitative research that is the focus group discussions and the in-depth interviews, some ground rules, the dos and don'ts and of course some visual methods about which we now need to know as they are being used more and more. Interviews also have to be designed. There are three main interview designs. One is the structured interview. Structured interviews follow the sequence of the same question asked in the same order.

They are very commonly used in quantitative. They can also be used to a certain extent in qualitative enquiries. It includes open and close ended questions. It has predetermined questions and wordings.

So this reduces the risk of the interviewer, its own biases, the researcher's own biases and offers consistency across interviews, a problem which we were talking about when we were talking about multicentric studies and multicentric coding. So the bias of the interviewer can be reduced and there is consistency. It is particularly valuable in research involving multiple interviewers. Highly structured nature of the interview leaves little freedom to draw fully on the participant's knowledge because I mean you cannot go beyond what is structured. So we cannot explore their responses or we cannot encourage the participant to expand on their responses.

We cannot use probes. So structured interviews are easier to conduct, but they have these limitations. Next we come to the next in complexity that is semi-structured interviews. Structured interviews include specific predetermined items or questions as per structured interviews, but there is some latitude given to the interviewers, some space is given to the interviewers to explore the responses pertaining to the research question of interest. This is what we commonly do in our interview guides and designs or the tools which we use for interviewing for qualitative research.

We do have a set of predetermined topics or items, but the interviewer can also explore by probing. Now the questions center on the selected topics and hypothesis because we have all done some review of literature and we gather some information and the questions center on these selected topics or on the hypothesis. But now exactly what will be asked is never predetermined in this type of interview. So the interviews are not entirely predetermined. The questions are devised, but the entire interview is never structured and predetermined.

The third at the opposite end of the extreme is the unstructured or open-ended interview. It can happen and it is the most common type of qualitative interview, but it requires immense skill on the part of the interviewer. Frequently researchers plan an interview guide consisting of planned topics for exploration, but the unstructured interview allows the participant the opportunity of probing or delving into the depths of meaning totally at his or her disposal. So the unstructured or open-ended interview can give a very rich outcome provided the interviewer is skilled enough to do so. So interviewing involves a few steps.

The first step in an interview is to not just to rush in, not just to start off with the questions, but to establish rapport with the participant and create a sense of trust. This may be affected by other issues like gender, you know, so that is why when we have gender as an issue or gender as a criteria for selection of participants, we have to be very careful for selecting the interviewer as well. We have to begin the conversation with less sensitive topics, benign topics and then gradually ease the conversation towards more sensitive and more complex issues. That is very natural, that is what we do in conversation also, start with very benign opening remarks and then we ask probe further and further. Now during the interview the responses which would need more induct probing should be identified.

So this is also something which you need to do as an interviewer. So, you can kind of outline them, identify them, the ones which you will need more probing. Now what is probing then? Probing is a technique where verbal or nonverbal communication is used to collect more information. For example, how can you probe? The interviewer can ask a directive question. Suppose you have an answer which you need you, which you feel you need more information on.

So, you could directly ask the participant could you tell me a little more about that or you could use an echo probe. Sometimes is this what you said, is not this what you said, this is just repeating what he or she said so that she says something more. So just paraphrase what the interviewer has just said. Thirdly one could use comments like aha, I see, yes. So people then feel encouraged to talk a little bit more about it.

Probes basically should be neutral, they should not be specifically questions, I mean they are not questions, they are neutral probes and they should be used to avoid biases. Like if the participant says I do not know or I am not sure, you can ask a neutral clarification probe. Like

there are no right or wrong answers to these questions, we are only interested in finding out how you feel about this. So this is just opening up the doors for the participant to speak a bit more. So this is like a clarification probe.

Now these are all verbal probes, there are some nonverbal probes as well. These are also effective, just nodding your head at times means that the participant feels you are listening to him, you would be encouraged to say a little bit more etcetera or just remaining silent, you know not talking too much because you as the interviewer is not supposed to talk much but to listen more or give the interview time to reflect to prepare his or her next thought, do not rush through an interview. Rushed interview never gives a good response. Now interviews also have protocols. So we need to decide the interview protocol.

Lastly, consider the degree of detail required to fully answer the research question. Unstructured or open-ended interview provides the most opportunity to elicit this in-depth detail. However, as I said earlier, for unstructured interviews, the interviewer needs to be trained and well prepared because it is totally unstructured. You will have to guide it totally by yourself. Second point is one has to be cognizant of how much is already known about the topic and what is to be learned.

Unless we know that, we will keep on dwelling on the same topic and dwelling on what we already know about it. Thirdly, consider the extent to which simplicity in data analysis or coding is necessary. More unstructured the data, more complex the analytic process. So we also have to think beforehand of how we are going to analyze and what do we need to abstract from the data to make it simple for analysis. So accordingly, we will have to ask the questions and get the responses.

Then practical issues, how the interview will be recorded. Is it digitally? Is the interviewer familiar with the recording device? Will the interviewer keep field notes? These are things which we need to decide beforehand. Next comes the process issues. Will the interview guide be pilot tested? In what order should the questions be asked because there should be an order of the questions. Are there issues with language that need to be considered when developing the interview questions? These again are issues which need to be decided beforehand.

And finally, data management issues. Where will the recordings be kept? Where will the field notes or demographic information be stored? Finally, again will the researcher give an honorarium for the participants? What form will the honorarium be in? Will it be cash incentive or just gifts, kinds, etc.? What if the participant withdraws from the interview? What will happen with respect to the honorarium? Shall we pay it or not? So these things might seem petty, but these are very important considerations that need to be planned beforehand. Therefore, you start in doing interviews. So as we said, the commonest type of interview was the focus group interview.

In 1991, marketing and psychological expert Ernest Dichter, he coined the name focus group. This term actually was used to describe meetings held with a limited group of participants with an objective of discussion. So focus group basically is defined as a small group of carefully selected participants who contribute to open discussion. The purpose is an open discussion. The group is carefully selected and this selection has to be based on certain criteria.

They should represent the larger populations they are attempting to target and focus groups actually is the most common type of group interview used in qualitative research. What do they do? The moderator is there. Moderator will ensure that the results are legitimate and the discussions are unbiased or less biased. Usually a group of 6 to 10 people, usually 8, meet to explore and discuss a topic in FGDs. The group shares their feedback, opinions, knowledge and insights about the topic.

The moderator takes notes on the discussions and opinions expressed by the group members and the right group members affect the results. So it is vital to pick up the right members to get good results. Even the obvious presence of group dynamics and interaction is a group. So they interact amongst themselves, there is the dynamics operating within the group which affects what people say, how people say, whether at all they say things or not. So this consideration is important from both the point of data generation and data analysis.

So that is why we have a sociometry also, a sociometric diagram also drawn to analyze what sort of dynamics and interaction is going on in the group during the interview. The purpose of the Focos group is to better understand how people think or feel about the designated topic and as you know there are many theories which is now beyond this particular session where the group thinking goes beyond individual thinking and basically we would like to understand these thinkings through focus group interviews. These are the steps for conducting. One we have to recruit the right participants most important. Then you have to choose a good moderator.

It is a make or break type of thing. So choose a good moderator, a trained one who has conducted a few such interviews. Then we need to arrange for recording the meeting for future purposes. We need to write clear discussion guidelines. You need to tell people what are the rules of participating in a focus group, not speaking all together, taking turns, everybody participating, etc.

Then conducting the session and generating a report and finally using this data to form a plan of action. So this is the basic circle of action. Determine the topic and goals of the focus group. Identify the potential participants. Then we have a guide, usually the moderator guide or the discussion guide as you call it which will have the questions.

Then choose a location, very vital, a comfortable location where you can conduct the discussion but has privacy again. Then we recruit 6 to 12 participants. If possible give them some incentives. Then conduct a 90 minutes to 120 minutes. This is the average time of session led by a trained moderator and finally analyze the session and present a thorough written and or oral report.

So this is how a focus group works. We were talking of group dynamics and sociometric diagrams to represent the ongoing group dynamics. Well this is one such sociometric diagram and as is very evident you would find that the participant number 4, participant number 3, participant number 6, these were dominating the discussion with instructions or other questions, their directions being towards the facilitator or the moderator and towards the others and there have been some who have been very quiet including number 5, the participant number 5. So once the note taker or the record keeper makes such a sociometric diagram and passes it on to the moderator, it is the duty of the moderator to remember the principles of group dynamics and involve the others in the discussion. Well this is another sociometric diagram which shows different color codes. I mean here the arrows have been drawn according to the themes, the structured code which has been developed according to the guide, perhaps the questions which you have asked question number 1, response in red, question number 2, response in yellow, things like that.

So you can directly get an idea how different issues were dealt with in a different way by the group. So but remember as we were saying group dynamics and group interaction is very important and you have various types of participants in focus group discussion. So it is important to have the sociometric or the sociometric graph in front of you to see whether you have some rushes. There are rushes who always keep their eyes on the clock, always trying to hurry things along and get the discussion over with. There are posers who are totally fake, they have only joined to get the incentive and they just keep on speaking nonsense fluently.

There are the dominant groups, I have just given you an example of some dominant people who do not know when to keep their mouth shut and they are so full of themselves they keep on speaking. There are the sheep, they are just followers, they will sway where the wind blows, they do not have any original own opinion and they do not even if they have they do not express it. The comedian is only making people laugh without putting in anything very worthwhile. The mannequin even if you punch them you would not know they would not notice. So they are part they do not participate, they are totally disengaged in the process, keep on doing their own thing perhaps looking at their mobile phones or whatever very irritating and totally non-productive.

The active thinker is the one we want who follows the discussion, highly engaged and participative. The silent thinker, these people actually do not talk very much in the beginning but they think and then they talk, just an introvert version of the active thinker. The aggressor,

the aggressor is very negative and they keep on bullying, they keep on fighting, so it is very hard to conduct a discussion with an aggressor and the therapy seeker. Typically people have come for their personal issues, there are some people who only follow their personal issues. So you have to get along with many of these people and perhaps some of them are always present in any group, so be very careful regarding the dynamics.

Now when to conduct the FGDs? FGDs are flexible data gathering techniques, they are time and cost efficient, they can generate more ideas and issues about a topic than an individual conversation might because participants, group participation provokes people to talk, so they would like to build on each other's ideas and shared experiences. You can use focus groups when looking for a range of ideas that people have about a topic, the ideas emerge in the context of the group or you can use it when pilot testing ideas, let us know what further is needed to be asked about. You can use it for obtaining information to design a larger quantitative studies, what sort of questions we can ask, it is used to seek insight into quantitative data already obtained and it is also used for participatory action research when we are using that for making decisions or seeking consensus, but there are certain potential limitations, some participants may be uncomfortable expressing their views or describing their experiences in a group setting particularly for most sensitive topics, people do not want to discuss their own sexual lives or their married lives or the domestic violence in a group like this, usually that is the experience. The researcher spends less time overall with the total number of participants than when conducting individual interviews, the group influences can distort individual opinion if most of the people have felt otherwise, so a single person who stands out sometimes cannot express their opinion and their opinion is not counted and there are also limits to confidentiality, this is emerging as a huge problem now. The members of the group though we say that we will not divulge their identities or what they said, but they themselves they may disclose aspects of the group process outside of the group.

So, that is an important issue which has to be explained to them beforehand. Ground rules for interviewing include greeting the respondent at the beginning of the interview in a culturally appropriate manner, explaining the purpose of the interview and obtaining informed consent as with others, the beginning part once it goes well, the rest becomes easy. One needs to also explain how this information will be recorded, ask for permission, they might be lower down in the socio economic status or wrong, but they are to be respected, their consent is to be sought for recording and if you do plan to have such a recording done. Arrange comfortable seating to facilitate communication, the note taker has to know has to be able to look into who is speaking, what they are speaking, they should be audible, they should be visible. Use icebreakers, do not just jump into the technicalities right in the beginning, it is always good to establish rapport with a few icebreakers.

Start with a topic that is not sensitive and is important to the respondent, this actually helps create an informal friendly atmosphere and facilitates a natural flow of ideas and opinions. Now, be an active listener as always I have been focusing on, we have always been taught to communicate, keep on speaking, but in these tools and techniques what is more important is

the art of listening. So, be an active listener means attentive listener, look at your informants face, do not keep on looking at your interview guide, because then the purpose the establishment of rapport and this trust building is gone and always behave in a culturally sensitive way and we need not elaborate on that, we all know that we have a culture which is very sensitive to certain issues and we also should be sensitive about it when we are conducting such interviews. Pick up phrases that the informant uses and use these phrases to phrase your questions. So, not in my language, in their language, we will try to know about them and put it down as in our question the language which we use in our questions.

Avoid giving opinions or judgments about the informants says and I would say both verbally and non verbally, treat her as equal I think this is the most important part which we lack, we have to treat the participant or the informer as an equal and not pass judgments, we are not there for moral judgment, we are not there for value judgment, we are not there to judge their knowledge as well. So, we just have to gather the information. Use open ended questions as we said close ended will only give you yes or no without giving the in depth views. Avoid asking leading questions which can give only yes no answers. Test your questions to see whether they are providing yes no answers only.

Allow free flow of the discussion, but again make sure that all topics are covered, do not let people deviate or free away from the main issues which are to be covered. Ask probing questions to clarify points or to encourage more explanation. Don't go to any issues raised by your informants, those might not be in your interview guide, but probe on these as well because you might not have thought about it, but this might give you some more important perspectives. Thank the informant in the end for giving her time and if she has further questions give him or her time to ask them. So, these are a set of ground rules which have been set by the WHO, but I am sure it is applicable for every person at every place for both individual interviewing and for group interviewing.

Now, how can you improve the quality of an interview to improve the quality you have to listen actively, listen try to summarize it rephrase it and then tell him or her at the end that well is this what you wanted to really say because this is what I understood. The second important characteristic is patience, we cannot rush the respondent, we have to allow them to speak freely while guiding the conversation to cover important issues. Gently refocus if it goes off track, but keep in mind that in-depth questions or other interview questions are like invitations to share a story and you would like to know the story, allow your respondents to tell us their stories. Again, there might be slight deviations from the topic which may require rearranging or reordering the question that is not a crime that can be done, new questions can also be asked it can again be according to the situation. I would end up at the end with some of sharing some of the visual methods.

These are some methods of data collection which are have earlier been used quite extensively and is being used right now. Auto voice is a qualitative research method which is used now

and this is basically gathers participant taken photographs and narratives and then transfers that into actionable knowledge and you can see that how this has been used to gather new insights and perspectives to raise awareness about hidden or overlooked issues because here you are not conducting the interview you are just arranging their photos, their narratives, their stories. So, this is a community map is another visual method which can be used to compare and discuss and note similarities and differences we will discuss this in detail later on. So, interview is the most commonly used technique for data collection in qualitative research there are several types, type of designs with different procedures and protocols. Most commonly used are the FGDs and IDIs each again has its own procedure and protocol.

It is absolutely necessary to keep the ground rules in mind and the do's and don'ts in mind visual methods like photo voice, community mapping etcetera support these qualitative discussions. These capture evidence driven data that can be rich and meaningful. So, it also develops community skills and understanding and it can be empowering and transformative for the recipient. So, this is an added advantage.

These are the references which we have used for this session. Thank you very much.