PROJECT INFORMATION

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Comparing Interview and Focus Group Data Collected in Person and Online

Principal investigator

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Organization

Family Health International

What was the research about?

To learn about people's experiences, researchers often use one-on-one interviews and group interviews, called focus groups. Researchers can do interviews and focus groups in person or online.

In this study, the research team wanted to learn if people shared more or different information in person versus online. The team did interviews and focus groups with women about safety during pregnancy and compared the information collected in person or online. To collect information online, the team used either online video, chat, a message board, or email. The team then compared differences in the average number of words and what women discussed across the methods.

What were the results?

The average number of words was similar for interviews and focus groups in person and using online video. In-person interviews had a higher average number of words than interviews using online chat or email. In-person focus groups had a higher average number of words than focus groups using online chat or message boards. Focus groups using online video had a higher average number of words than those using online chat.

In-person and online interviews and focus groups resulted in a similar number of topics discussed. The amount of sensitive information women shared was about the same in person and online. Women were more likely to disagree in focus groups using online chat than in in-person groups or groups using online video.

Who was in the study?

The study included 171 women in North Carolina. Of these, 82 percent were white, 4 percent were black, and 7 percent were of another race. In addition, 6 percent were Hispanic. The median age was 32, and 77 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher. Women in the study had been pregnant in the past three years and hoped to become pregnant in the next three years.

What did the research team do?

The research team assigned women, by chance, to either an interview or a focus group. Next, the team assigned women to one of four groups:

- **In person.** The team held interviews and focus groups in an office conference room.
- **Online video.** The team created a private online video chat room. The team used webcams for video and a telephone conference call line for audio.
- **Online chat.** Women answered questions in real time using a private online text chat room.
- **Online message board or email.** For focus groups, women answered questions on an online discussion board for 7 to 10 days. For interviews, women answered questions throughout 10 days using email.

In focus groups and interviews, the research team asked women about the Zika virus and making decisions about safety during pregnancy.

What were the limits of the study?

The study included women with home internet access. Most women were white and had high education levels. Findings may differ for people from other backgrounds or without home internet access.

Future research could include people from different backgrounds.

How can people use the results?

Researchers can consider the results when choosing ways to ask people about their experiences.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/Guest199.