Research Interviews for Community Members

USF PathED Collaborative
Stakeholder Research Capacity Building Workshop Series
Agenda

- Introductions
- What is a research interview?
- Kinds of Interviews
- Interview procedures
- Interviewing challenges
Acknowledgements & Funding

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Funding Source:
This training was funded through a Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) Eugene Washington PCORI Engagement Award (EA #10252).
What is a research interview?
“Conversation As Research”

• Research interviews are “based on the conversations of daily life;”
• They are also professional conversations.

“It is an inter-view, where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and interviewee...an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest.

(Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015)
Collecting Data via Interviews

- Research interviews have a **structure** and a **purpose**.
- Interviewing is focused on careful questioning and listening designed to obtain information that can help us understand the world better:
  - **Particularly**, from “the subject’s” point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience
Building Deeper Understanding

• Conducting interviews with those who participate in programs or larger processes can challenge long-held beliefs and policies.
  • Research with people with schizophrenia concluded that individuals often recover sufficiently to function independently (Davidson, 2003).
  • Research on how gay men contracted AIDS found that transmission resulted from “trusting the wrong person,” as opposed to lack of knowledge or intravenous drug use (Aguinaldo et al., 2009).
Making Sense of Complexity

• Interviewing people involved in various sides of a dispute or who maintain different versions of an incident can lead to “more thoughtful or nuanced conclusions” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).
Kinds of Interviews
Types of Qualitative Interviews

• Unstructured interviews – Interviews that are more conversational in nature.
• Semistructured interviews – Guided conversation using a protocol, although can be conversational in nature.
• Structured interviews – Strictly adhere to interview protocols and minimal/to no probing.
Unstructured Interviews

• As Bernard (2011) notes, unstructured interviews are *not informal*.

• These interviews are more conversational in nature and don’t make use of a protocol.

• May actually require more work, in that researchers must work to memorize and jot down notes whenever possible.

• Very versatile form of interviewing: can be used to develop interview protocols, good for building rapport, and for interviewing populations that may
Semistructured Interviews

• Researcher uses an interview guide that lists questions and topics to cover.

• While there is a conversational quality to these interviews, interview guide or protocol guides the interaction, provides instructions about probes, and identify key questions.

• Order may change based on interview flow or we may focus more in certain areas, if research or respondent emphasizes a particular topic.
Structured Interviews

- People are asked to respond to “as nearly identical a set of stimuli as possible” (Bernard, 2011).
- Questions are predetermined and instructions are outlined explicitly for respondents.
- The goal is to ensure that you ask each respondent identical questions in a predetermined order with no changes.
Interview Procedures
Procedures for Preparing to Conduct Interviews

1. Determine the research questions that will be answered by interviews.
2. Identify interviewees who can best answer these questions.
3. Determine the type of interview by identifying which is most practical and what interactions will net the most useful information to answer your research questions.
4. Design an interview protocol or interview guide.
5. Refine the interview questions and the procedures through pilot testing (if possible)
6. Locate a distraction-free place for conducting the interview. (Try to ensure privacy for audio recording and ethical considerations.)
7. Obtain consent from the interviewee to participate in the study.
The Interview Guide / Protocol

- The interview guide serves as a script, which helps to guide the course of the interview.
  - May contain a list of topics to cover or a detailed sequence of carefully worded questions.
- Thematically, the questions relate to the theoretical conceptions of the research topic and to the subsequent analysis of the topic.

  (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015)
Preliminary Considerations: The Interview Guide

• If subsequent analysis will involve coding of text, then interview questions should seek to clarify meanings – interviewer uses instructions, probes or themes to clarify continuously during interview.

• Questions should promote a positive interaction, maintain conversational ‘flow’, and encourage respondents to talk about their experiences and feelings.

• Questions should be easy to understand and devoid of academic or other jargon, if at all possible.
Interview Questions

- "Thick description" (Geertz, 1973) requires depth, detail and richness in interviews.
- To achieve this level of detail, researchers establish:
  - Main questions
  - Probes
  - Follow-up questions
General Principles for Designing Main Questions

• Begin with broad questions that are relatively easy to answer from the interviewees' experience. (e.g. grand tour question)

• Avoid, as much as possible, presenting your own examples in a main question.

• Avoid questions that encourage/allow a “yes” or “no” response. (”Can you describe..?” or “Tell me how..?”)

• ‘Why’ questions can be tricky. Try to elicit enough information to generate the “whys” from the data.
Designing Main Questions

• Research questions (or problem) should be translated into main questions.
  • Approach 1: Researcher has enough background knowledge about a topic, seeks to obtain certain specific information to answer research question(s).
  • Approach 2: Researcher not yet sure what specific information will answer research question(s). Main questions encourage the interviewee to discuss separate components.

(Rubin & Rubin, 2005)
Designing Main Questions (cont).

• When information on topic is limited, i.e. researcher not sure about details related to issue, questions should focus on broader components or activities that can elicit the detail.

• Want to avoid designing questions based on researcher assumptions or guesses to avoid simply testing own ideas – we want interviewees to share experiences we may not know about or have considered to build a fuller picture of the issue or phenomenon under study.
Listening for What Is Not Said

• Researchers often focus on what has not been said – just as much as what respondents do share.
• Well thought-out probes can help us to elicit information that is not readily shared.
Probes: Moving Interviews Forward

• Probes help interviewers manage the interaction, elicit more detail (especially when information is not readily shared), and clarifying information.
• Probes can include verbal cues
  • May be outlined in detail for structured interviews
• Non-verbal cues may also serve as probes; hand gestures and facial expressions can be key part of interviews.
Types of Probes

• Researchers categorize probes in different ways. Some commonly used probes:
  • Short silence/“Mm-hmm” – Communicates that you are listening but allows space for speaker to continue.
  • Echoing responses – Repeating a response to ensure that interviewer has recorded it correctly, followed by “Then what?”
  • Elaboration probes – “Can you tell me more about that?”
Activity!

Individual activity (15 minutes):
(1) Pick a topic (e.g. experiences of discrimination in a MH treatment setting)
(2) Draft questions & probes
(3) Get in small groups & discuss
(4) Full group discussion
Interviewing Challenges
Interviewing Challenges

• Researchers have identified a number of challenging situations or interactions that they have encountered in the field.
• One way to address is to anticipate possible challenges before you begin to pilot questions or interview guides.
• Make note of challenges you experience and those shared by more experienced interviewers.
A number of factors can affect rapport with respondents
- Your dress
- Location of interview
- Researcher identity/demographic characteristics
Response Effects/Bias

- Measurable differences in the responses of people being interviewed.
- These are often predictable from characteristics of the interviewer and interviewees.
  - Not just race/visible characteristics, may relate to dialect and even, political affiliation.
Response Effects/Bias (cont.)

• Deference effect – when respondents tell you what they think you want to hear.

• Social desirability effect – when respondents tell you things that (they think) make them look good.

• Third-Party presence – Respondents may change their responses if there is someone else (usually a spouse, family member or other community member) is in the room.
Capturing the Data

• ALWAYS take notes.

• Not always possible to use audio recorders, but when using:
  • Make sure that you have good working knowledge of device(s) you will be using and **test them before each interview**.
  • Batteries, batteries, batteries.
  • Consider using more than one recording device per interview

**Always make sure to have respondent permission to audio or visually record an interview.**
Ethical Considerations When Interviewing

• Always remember basic principles of ethical research practice:
  • Be mindful of the information you request and how this answers research questions.
  • Balance this with human subjects protections – how will information collected affect respondents?
Activity!

Partners interview (14 minutes):
(1) Spend 7 minutes ‘interviewing’ your partner about a topic he/she agrees to
(2) Switch roles
(3) Discuss
Questions & Discussion