

Focus Groups and Other Qualitative Methods

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What Is Qualitative Research?

“Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.”

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. London: Sage Publications.

The Decision to Use Qualitative Research Methods

- Use qualitative research methods when:
 - Your research goal is to explore a topic or an idea
 - You want to gain insight into/deep understanding of a target audience's lifestyle, culture, motivations, behaviors, and preferences
 - You want to understand the reasons behind the results from quantitative research
 - You want to get input from key informants or others outside the target audience.

Value in mixing qualitative and quantitative research methods

Quantitative research excels at summarizing large amounts of data and reaching generalizations based on statistical projections. Qualitative research excels at "telling the story" from the participant's viewpoint and providing the rich descriptive detail that sets quantitative results into their human context.

Who Will Serve in This Research Effort?

- Technical assistance from FAMU & USF/The Chiles Center in specifics of qualitative methods, to include
 - Developing interview questions & focus group guides
 - Guidance in site/time selection
 - Guidance in participation recruitment
 - Training community residents as data collectors (interviewers, focus group moderators & assistants/recorders, etc.)
 - Human Subjects Protection Training

The Whys & Whats of Human Subjects Protection

- To prevent unethical human subjects research
 - Universities subject to Institutional Review Board
 - All research personnel must have Human Subjects Protection certification
 - NIH NCI - Human Participant Protections Education <http://cme.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/learning/humanparticipant-protections.asp?action=register>
 - CITI Basic & Refresher Course <http://www.citiprogram.org>
- Safeguards such as informed consent, locked/password protected data storage, etc., must be initiated
- Example: Public Health Service "Tuskegee" Syphilis Study (1932-1972)
 - No informed consent
 - Deliberately misinformed

Three Main Methods for Collecting Qualitative Data

- Direct Observation
- In-Depth Interviews
- Focus Groups

Direct Observation

- Observer does not actively query the respondent
- Includes everything from field research where one lives in another context or culture for a period of time to photographs that illustrate some aspect of the phenomenon.
- Data can be recorded in many of the same ways as interviews (stenography, audio, video) and through pictures, photos or drawings

In-depth Interviews

- Data can be recorded in a wide variety of ways including stenography, audio recording, video recording or written notes.
- Differs from direct observation primarily in that there is a questioner and one or more interviewees.
- Purpose of the interview is to probe the ideas of the interviewees about the phenomenon of interest.

Focus Groups and Qualitative Fieldwork

A Brief Overview

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What are focus groups?

Group discussion, conducted several times until similar trends and patterns in perception, attitudes, ideas are shown

Why Do Focus Groups?

- To collect qualitative data
- To determine feelings, perceptions and manner of thinking of participants regarding an issue
 - ☐ Attitudes and perceptions are developed in part by interaction with other people
- To determine community needs and issues

Developing a plan:

- Audience to target
- What kind of information are you looking for?
- Moderator and assistant
- Procedures to follow
- Time line
- Proposed budget

Size and Number of Groups

- Factors determining size of focus groups:
 - Level of interest
 - Level of detail required
 - Experience of moderator
 - Number of available participants
- Factors affecting number of groups:
 - Time allotted and size of the staff
 - Level of heterogeneity
 - Level of structure

Recruiting participants:

- Recruit with the purpose of the group in mind
- Individuals with common characteristics
(age, interest, profession, etc)
- Do not have spouses in the same focus groups
- Commonality, not diversity
- Unfamiliar to each other (familiarity tends to inhibit disclosure)

Recruiting participants:

- Check community activities before setting a time and date for the focus group
- Call potential participants 10-14 days before
- Send personalized invitations one week before
- Telephone each individual the day before the group
- Emphasize the benefits of attending and participating in a focus group

Moderating the focus group:

- Identify a trained moderator and an assistant to conduct the focus group interview.
- The moderator creates a warm and friendly atmosphere, directs and keeps the flow of the conversation and takes notes.

Designing questions...

- Use open-ended questions
- Focus the questions: general to specific
- Avoid dichotomous questions
- Don't ask "why"
- Use "think back" questions
- Be cautious of "what if" questions

Questions appear spontaneous but are carefully designed and in a logical sequence and memorized by the moderator

Before the session you will need:

- Comfortable room for conducting focus group
- High quality tape or video recorder
- High quality microphone
- Check equipment before the session
- Notepad for taking notes

Beginning the Focus Group Discussion

- Recommended introduction pattern:
 - ❑ Welcome
 - ❑ Overview of topic (Set the tone)
 - ❑ Ground rules
 - ❑ First question

Immediately after the Focus

Group:

- Draw a diagram of the seating arrangement
- Moderator and assistant debriefing

Advantages of a focus group:

- Fast and relatively inexpensive
- Generates ideas for questions to be included in other survey methods
- Plenty of rich and contextual data

Disadvantages of a focus group:

- Easily misused
- Requires special moderator skills
- Data interpretation is tedious
- Avoiding bias can be difficult
- Capturing major issues can be difficult

References

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Real Life Examples from the Field

Racial Disparity in Infant Mortality Among African American Women in Florida: A Comparative Study

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Florida REACH 2010 Activities

- Quantitative data collection
- Qualitative data collection
- Consumer and Provider Marketing Campaign Plan

Sample

- African American Women 15-44
- Gadsden County-
Surveys: 467
Focus groups: 13
- Hillsborough County-
Surveys: 430
Focus Groups: 14

Instruments

- Behavioral
- Psychosocial
- Socioeconomic/Political

Qualitative Data

Gadsden County

Behavioral

- Douching:

“I douche after my cycle. I started when I was 16 years old.”

“I seen my sister doing it, so I just tried it.”

Behavioral

- Periodontal Disease

“Every time I was pregnant I had to get a tooth pulled. The first one was a wisdom tooth and the second was a cavity...”

“The dentist would not pull my teeth because I was pregnant.”

Behavioral

- Home remedies:

“Grandma knows more than the doctor.”

“I would go to my grandmother or mother for a home remedy to prevent using antibiotics during pregnancy.”

Psychosocial

- Discrimination

“Sometimes at the doctor’s office. I have sat there like 30 minutes and other people come in and they wait on them. So I have just gotten up and left.”

“You don’t get any respect if you do not have insurance or are on Medicaid.”

Psychosocial

- Stress

“ ...It is a stress everyday even though I do provide for my children to have what I couldn't have...”

“Men. They give us a hard time.”

Socio-economics

“ I feel safe in a way and in a way I don't. Cause it's so much going on out here.”

“Half the time you have to beg somebody to take you somewhere and you paying them.”

Qualitative Data

Hillsborough County

Behavioral

- Douching:

“What did [your mom] tell you about douching?” She said to keep your body clean.”

“It keeps women having vaginal discharges and give’ em yeast. So I use douches only periodically.”

Psychosocial

- Stress

“ ...If you're on Medicaid or any kind of assistance for medical procedures they don't really care.”

“ ...I know that you're in pain but do you have your Medicaid number, Medicaid card...”

Psychosocial

- Stress

“It seems like the stress levels for Black women doubles that of the stress level for any other race. We have a lot more stress to deal with.”

“Because me and my significant other...are so young and we are both trying to start out in life, it put like a lot of stress on the relationship.”

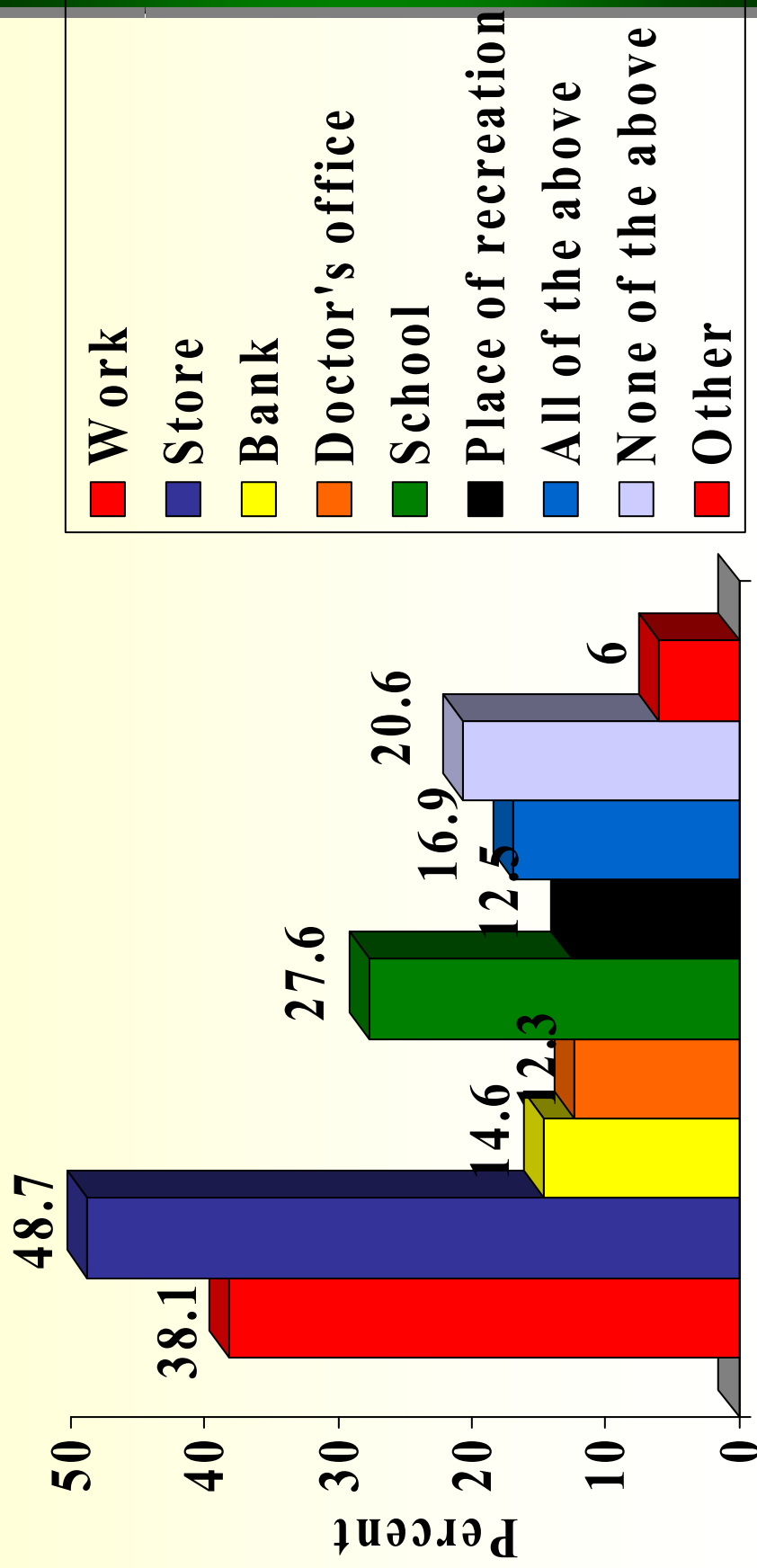
Socio-economics

“ ...Sometimes we have to get up financially and hit the pavement running; some that might be able to jump into their cars, but others they might have to walk four blocks and take two buses.”

Socio-economics

“...I think welfare holds you down in a way because say you get a check and then decide to go and get a little part-time job...it doesn't matter they cut the little money off that you need...you really need that money

Have you ever experienced discrimination at:



Conclusion

If done appropriately, the richness and context of qualitative data can help us comprehend issues by opening windows on cultural understandings of health and disease

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