

Focus Group Discussion

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What do you think about when you see
this picture?



What is a focus group discussion?

- ...a **carefully planned** discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a **defined area of interest** in a permissive, nonthreatening environment. It is conducted with approximately 7 to 10 people by a skilled interviewer

(Kreuger 1996)

What is a focus group discussion?

- Focus groups are group discussions exploring a specific set of issues. The group is **focused** in that it involves some kind of **collective activity** - such as viewing a video, examining a single health promoting message, or simply debating a set of questions. Crucially, focus groups are distinguished from the broader category of group interviews by the explicit use of **group interaction** to generate data. Instead of asking questions of each person in turn, focus group researchers encourage participant to **talk to one another**; asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each others experiences and points of view.

(Barbour & Kitzinger 1999)



What characterizes a Focus Group Discussion?

- Planned discussion - not "spontaneous" group discussion
- Selected group - have something in common
- Specific topic - focused discussion
- Group interaction - not questions to each person in turn

What kind of qualitative data do I need?

- Knowledge, attitudes, perceptions
 - INTERVIEWS
- Norm systems, experiences, opinions
 - FOCUS GROUPS
- Behavior
 - OBSERVATIONS

What kind of knowledge could be gained from FGD?

- Knowledge about how people view an experience, intervention, disease etc.
- Information about opinions and norm systems

Group interaction

Attitudes are developed in interaction with others!
Group interaction may:

- Help individuals to develop and express an opinion
- Stimulate the participant to react more spontaneous and to explore their different point of views more freely
- Draw the attention from the researcher

Focus groups have the capacity to become more than the sum of the participants!

What is a focus group useful for?

- discovering opinions and behaviours that the team may not know much about or issues that had not been considered by the researcher
- generating hypotheses and ideas, further key informants and new directions for research
- understanding local vocabulary and terms for particular behaviour,
- validating and crosschecking findings from other data and hypotheses.

What is a focus group useful for? (cont'd)

- exploring further what the group feels about a topic.
- validating and cross-checking findings from other methods
- assessing the representativeness of emerging findings.
- judgement of the reaction of selected groups to suggested interventions



How to facilitate group interaction?

1) Planning and preparations

2) Group composition

3) Collective tasks

4) Moderators' skills

1) Planning and preparations

- Purpose - focus groups suitable?
- Target population?
- How - Questions and tasks?
- How to reach out, sampling?
- Time and place?
- Resources and staff?

2) Group composition - Size

- "Small enough for everyone to have opportunity to share insights, and yet large enough to provide diversity of perceptions"



2) Group composition

- Homogeneous?
- Mixing sex?
- Know each other?
- Already existing groups?

2) Group composition - sampling

- Identify important characteristics of group participants
- Maintain control over the selection process
- Strive to reach different views....

However;

- No "perfect" sampling procedure exist...
- Emergent and flexible research design needed!

2) Group composition - Examples of sampling strategies

- Lists
- Groups that meet for other purposes
- Key informants
- Snowball sampling
- Invitation in newspapers etc.
- Randomization

3) "Collective tasks"

- Free listing
- Pile sorting
- Rank order
- Discuss "Individual" survey responses...

4) The role of the moderator

- Create an unthreatening environment - information, ethical rules
- Control and steer the discussion
- Encourage everyone to participate - support quiet ones, hold back dominant ones
- Encourage all types of comments - broad range of ideas
- Careful not to make judgments - No right and wrong

4) The role of the moderator - creating an unthreatening environment

- "Suitable place" - nice environment without disturbing factors
- Seating that encourage discussions - circle, eye-contact
- Begin by "socializing" - serve something to eat or drink
- Introduction and summing up important - "rounds" with presentation and final comment

However;

Be prepared for the unexpected - flexible design!

Moderate (cont'd)

Personality types in focus group

- **Experts:** people who *must* tell everyone everything they know.
- **Non-participants:** people who remain quiet
- **Limelight hogs:** people who need attention
- **Friendship pairs:** friends should be separated so they do not disrupt the group by talking among themselves.

Ten steps to conducting FGD

1. Arrive early at the location.
2. Arrange the location so that the group will sit in a loose circle.
3. Try and ensure that the location is as quiet and as free of interruptions as possible.
4. Welcome participants warmly and when assembled introduce yourself and any assistants present. Explain why the focus group is taking place.
5. Allow participants to briefly introduce themselves to the group. Introduce the first topic slowly and coax participants into talking.

Ten steps (cont'd)

6. Be a good listener and cultivate the habit of asking 'why' and 'how'.
7. Summarise the preceding discussion at appropriate points.
8. Refreshments and breaks may be required in longer focus groups.
9. When the focus group is finished, summarise the key issues and opinions and ask if anyone has anything that they want to add.
10. At the end, thank participants and if you have not already done so, take down any contact details. You may wish to contact them in the near future



Combining Focus Groups with other methods - Quantitative

- Before a quantitative procedure - before constructing a questionnaire
- At the same time as quantitative methods - triangulation
- After quantitative procedures - help in interpretations of questionnaire results



Combining Focus Groups with other methods - Qualitative

- Before qualitative interviews - i.e. to gain knowledge and to develop interview guides
- At the same time as other qualitative methods - listing, sorting, ranking
- After other qualitative methods - interpretation of observations and interview results

Focus Groups - means of assistance

- Questioning route - list of questions in complete sentences, or
- Topic guide - List of topics to be covered
- Tape recorder
- Written notes
- Note-taker - work in team, researcher triangulation

Advantages with Focus Groups

- Natural “real life” situation - People often feel comfortable in group discussion
- A lot of information rather quickly
- Good for identifying and exploring (a range of) beliefs, attitudes and norms in a population
- Speedy results are possible
- Increases the sample size of qualitative studies



Limitations with Focus Groups

- The researcher has less control over the interview
- Data can be more difficult to analyze - data on group NOT individual level
- Limitation of number of questions
- Requires skilled moderators
- Groups are harder to gather