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Focus Group Commentary

Focus Groups—What Is the Same, What Is New, What Is Next?

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Abstract

Nineteen years ago *Qualitative Health Research (QHR)* featured a special issue on focus group research, and 6 years ago, *QHR* again featured a special issue on focus group research. Why have another special issue on this topic? There are new as well as continuing advantages and problems, and many researchers are new to this approach. This commentary will discuss what is the same, what is new, and what might be next.

What Is the Same

Focus groups continue to be used for various purposes and have varying levels of analysis, from information for questionnaire development for item content and natural vocabulary, to exploring deeply held beliefs and attitudes. Also unchanged are the occasional criticisms that focus groups are a lazy way of collecting shallow data and only collect snippets. Although this, unfortunately, may be the case in some instances, an understanding of the foundations of focus group research will guide the researcher to develop an appropriate and useful study design.

The social-psychological concept of group dynamics is a conceptual foundation that is unique in focus groups. Focus groups are planned to capitalize on the synergy arising from interactions of the members, which encourages participation in most well-planned settings. However, this strength is also a possible pitfall that can lead to censoring (actively withholding comments) and conformity (peer influence to agree with others) (Carey & Asbury, 2012). The group factors that negatively influence participation include individual perceptions of who is the most influential person in the session, possibilities of further contact with members, and what is perceived as the proper response. Planning to have homogeneous members and adequate leadership skills will alleviate most issues. Also important is building trust and rapport by a careful introduction to the study and providing information on the confidentiality processes in handling the data.

Also unchanged are issues that are ...

Keywords: cross-cultural; cultural competence; focus groups; methodology; qualitative; research; technology

Focus Group Methods

Deliberative Discussion Focus Groups

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Abstract

This article discusses a new approach for the conduct of focus groups in health research. Identifying ways to educate and inform participants about the topic of interest prior to the focus group discussion can promote more quality data from informed opinions. Data on this deliberative discussion approach are provided from research within three federally funded studies. As healthcare continues to improve from scientific and technological advancements, educating the research participants prior to data collection about these complexities is essential to gather quality data.

Keywords: USA; deliberative discussion; education; focus groups; qualitative

In-Person Versus Online Focus Group Discussions: A Comparative Analysis of Data Quality

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Abstract

Online focus group discussions (FGDs) are becoming popular as a qualitative research method. Methodological examinations regarding the data quality of online versus more traditional in-person FGDs are limited. We compared two online FGDs with two in-person FGDs conducted with gay and bisexual men using a sensitive topic (the experience of intimate partner violence) to examine differences in data quality between the two methods. The online FGDs resulted in larger word count but were shorter in time than the in-person FGDs. There was high overlap in the themes generated across groups; however, the online discussions yielded one additional theme regarding a sensitive topic. In-person FGDs involved less sharing of in-depth stories, whereas sensitive topics were discussed more candidly in the online FGDs. The results illustrate that although the format of the data generated from each type of FGD may differ, the content of the data generated is remarkably similar.

Keywords: focus groups; online; qualitative methods, qualitative analysis; research, qualitative; violence

Focus Group Piths

Viewing Focus Groups Through a Critical Incident Lens

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Abstract

Scholars often do not describe in detail the complex process of conducting focus groups, including what happens when they take unexpected turns. A critical incident lens provides a framework for better analyzing and understanding what actually happens during focus group sessions. Using a critical incident approach, we examine our experiences of carrying out focus groups about the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine with vaccine-eligible adolescent girls and parents/caregivers of vaccine-eligible adolescent girls in New Mexico. The critical incident lens allowed us to productively explore the context and interactional dynamics of our focus groups and ultimately pushed us to talk through the challenges of conducting and analyzing them. We hope this serves as a call to qualitative researchers to be attentive to the critical incidents in your own research to enrich your analysis and contribute to a broader discussion of the realities of focus group conduct.

Keywords: cancer, screening and prevention; critical incident technique; focus groups; reflexivity

Focus Group Articles

Hegemonic Masculinity, HIV/AIDS Risk Perception, and Sexual Behavior Change Among Young People in Ghana

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Abstract

Among the youth in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, a paradoxical mix of adequate knowledge of HIV/AIDS and high-risk behavior characterizes their daily lives. Based on original qualitative research in Ghana, I explore in this article the ways in which the social construction of masculinity influences youth's responses to behavior change HIV/AIDS prevention interventions. Findings show that although awareness of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the risks of infection is very high among the youth, a combination of hegemonic masculinity and perceptions of personal invulnerability acts to undermine the processes

of young people's HIV/AIDS risk construction and appropriate behavioral change. I argue that if HIV/AIDS prevention is to be effective and sustained, school- and community-based initiatives should be developed to provide supportive social spaces in which the construction of masculinity, the identity of young men and women as gendered persons, and perceptions of their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS infection are challenged.

Keywords: Africa, sub-Saharan; HIV/AIDS prevention; adolescents / youth, at-risk; behavior change; health behavior; masculinity; qualitative analysis

Health Conditions Prior to Imprisonment and the Impact of Prison on Health: Views of Detained Women

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Abstract

Detained women have certain health conditions prior to incarceration and these conditions can improve, worsen, or remain the same in prison, depending on the prisoner's background, the characteristics of the prison, and the arrest experience. This study investigated the health of detained women and the influence of incarceration from their perspective. Three focus groups were conducted among 15 inmates, and data were analyzed according to thematic analysis procedures. Detainees' health backgrounds varied with regard to their level of health concerns, contact with health services, and health behaviors. A positive influence of incarceration was described by patients with chronic illness, patients with drug addiction, and victims of interpersonal violence. Among women with mental illnesses or those without previous health problems, reports do not reveal benefits of imprisonment for mental health. These data emphasize the importance of specialized health care and the need to invest in mental health care in corrective institutions.

Keywords: Portugal; focus group; health; prison; qualitative; thematic analysis; women

Intra-Household Nutritional Dynamics: A Cross-Sectional Study of Maasai Communities in Kenya

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Abstract

To date, research on dietary consumption and nutritional outcomes of the Maasai in Kenya have failed to explore how gender dynamics and intra-household bargaining power affect

dietary decisions. This exploratory qualitative study investigates the decision-making processes regarding eating habits and health-seeking behavior within Maasai families in Kenya, and how such roles currently support or conflict with maternal and child health (MCH) program activities in the field of nutritional education and practices. The data were collected from the three group ranches in Laikipia County in Kenya and draws on six focus group discussions with a total of 24 Maasai men and 24 Maasai women. Our research has documented that the dietary and health-seeking decisions of Maasai families are influenced by complex intra- and extra-household factors. Programmatic interventions need to examine decision-making processes within the context of multi-generational family dynamics and gender hierarchies to scale up community-driven interventions to ensure sustained behavior change.

Keywords: Kenya; Maasai; cross-sectional; exploratory; gender; maternal child nutrition; qualitative field study

Pearls, Pith & Provocation

How Not to Let Secrets Out When Conducting Qualitative Research With Dyads

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Abstract

Confidentiality is one of the cornerstones of research involving human participants. Researchers are the frontline gatekeepers of their participants' right to confidentiality, and situations can arise that challenge this responsibility. This is the case when individuals who have shared a common experience (i.e., dyads) are interviewed separately, but interview results are disseminated within the context of dyads. Based on our experience of conducting research with dyads and given how little literature is available to serve as guide, we set out to write this article to share the knowledge we acquired and the solutions we found. We will describe both the ethical challenges and the methodological decisions involved in conducting qualitative research with dyads. The article also describes different modalities of dyadic analysis, their benefits and drawbacks. This endeavor seems especially relevant as research with dyads is emerging in several domains involving couples, families, caregivers and health.

Keywords: confidentiality/privacy; data collection and management; disclosure; ethics/moral perspectives; interviews; qualitative; qualitative analysis; relationships; research; research design.

General Articles

Rape Survivors' Experiences of the *Silent Protest*: Implications for Promoting Healing and Resilience

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Abstract

This article examines the experiences of nine rape survivors who participated in the Silent Protest, an annual protest march at Rhodes University that aims to highlight the sexual abuse of women, validate the harm done, and foster solidarity among survivors. Participants responded to a semi-structured interview focusing on the context of their rape and its impact, and their experiences of participation in the Protest. In the first phase of data analysis, synoptic case narratives were written. In the second, themes from participants' experience were identified using interpretative phenomenological analysis. In the third, the data were examined in light of questions around the extent to which participation contributed to healing. Participants reported experiences of validation and empowerment but the majority were suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder. In some cases, participation had exacerbated self-blame and avoidant coping. Recommendations are made about the provision of psychoeducation and counseling at such events.

Keywords: Silent Protest; South Africa; empowerment; healing; lived experiences; rape; re-traumatization

The Symbolic Value and Limitations of Racial Concordance in Minority Research Engagement

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Abstract

The well-documented underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in research demands action. The field of health disparities research, however, lacks scientific consensus about how best to respectfully recruit underrepresented minority populations in research. We explore the investigators' perspective regarding how their own racial and ethnic background influenced their ability to recruit minorities, including (a) the influence of racial concordance ("race-matching") in research recruitment, (b) attributes and shared values important in the

development of trust with minority communities, and (c) the role self-reflection plays in the development of meaningful research relationships. In 2010, we conducted in-depth, semi-structured, telephone interviews with investigators (N= 31) experienced with minority populations. Through the analysis of this coherent narrative, we uncovered both the symbolic and surface-level assumptions regarding minority recruitment to expose a deep structural understanding of race, ethnicity, and social context that is critical for bridging the true social difference between researchers and participants.

Keywords: ethnicity; minorities; qualitative analysis; race; relationships, research; research participation; vulnerable populations

Parents' Recall and Reflections on Experiences Related to HPV Vaccination for Their Children

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Abstract

Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination coverage remains suboptimal in the United States. We conducted in-depth interviews with parents of adolescents from an urban primary care center serving a low-income minority population to describe their experiences. We identified the following themes: (a) parents of unvaccinated children generally had not discussed the vaccine with providers and had low awareness; (b) among unaware parents, provision of brief information generally resulted in positive comments about the vaccine; (c) vaccine was typically not requested by parents but rather offered by providers; (d) strength of the recommendations from providers varied, and vaccine was sometimes presented as optional or low priority; (e) parents had low awareness of the three-dose regimen and poor recall about completion; and (f) limited understanding of why boys should be vaccinated. More than 7 years after the introduction of HPV vaccine, there is substantial room for improving the way it is recommended and discussed by providers.

Keywords: barriers; health care; human papillomavirus; immunization; pediatrics; qualitative analysis

The Experiences and Perceptions of Street-Involved Youth Regarding Emergency Department Services

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Abstract

Street-involved (SI) youth comprise a substantial component of the urban homeless population. Despite being significant users of hospital emergency department (ED) services for acute and ongoing health needs, little is known about their experiences of ED care and the factors affecting their ED use. This study used a grounded theory and community-based approach to examine these issues. Focus groups and individual interviews were facilitated with 48 SI youth between ages 15 and 26 years, recruited in hospital or through community agencies serving SI youth in a major Western Canadian city. Results demonstrate that SI youth often perceived suboptimal care and experienced long waiting periods that led to many avoiding or prematurely exiting the ED. Service gaps appeared to have a negative bearing on their care and health outcomes. Findings invite a critical review of ED care processes, structures, and staff interactions in the aim of enhancing ED services to SI youth.

Keywords: emergency care; health care, access to; health care, users' experiences; health, adolescents; homelessness; relationships, patient–providers; youth, young adults

Chronic Disease Self-Management by People With HIV

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Abstract

As HIV has transitioned into a chronic disease, reappraisal of clinical management has occurred with chronic disease self-management (CDSM) as one possibility. However, despite extensive work on CDSM across a range of diseases, little attention has focused on psychosocial contexts of the lives of people for whom programs are intended. This article reports semi-structured interviews used to explore health practices and motivations of 33 people with HIV (PWHIV) in Australia. Within participants' accounts, different forms of subjectivity and agency emerged with implications for how they understood and valued health-related behaviors. Four themes

arose: health support and disclosure, social support and stigma, employment/structure, and health decisions beyond HIV. The experience of stigma and its intersection with CDSM remains relatively un-chartered. This study found stigma shapes agency and engagement with health. Decisions concerning health behaviors are often driven by perceived social and emotional benefit embedded in concerns of disclosure and stigma.

Keywords: Australia; HIV/AIDS; chronic; illness and disease; self-care; semi-structured interviews; stigma