Beyond the Survey: Getting to know your target population using qualitative data

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Agenda

- Introduction and overview

- Qualitative data and key informant interviews
  - Justin Hunt, University of Michigan
  - Healthy Minds Qualitative Study of College Counseling Centers

- Overview of focus groups
  - Julie Halverson, SPRC
  - Barbara Pearson, Kansas State University

- Discussion and wrap-up
ACHA-NCHA

Q. 40E: In the last 12 months 36.2% of students reported they felt so depressed it was difficult to function.

– What does this information tell us?

– What else do you want to know about this?

Why Focus Groups?

• Gather information
  – Explore knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs
  – Form questions for quantitative research
    • Spontaneous exchange that you don’t get w/survey
  – Inform strategy
    • Communication planning
    • Implementing interventions
  – Learn about hard to reach populations
    • What services are they likely to access?
    • What are their perceptions of mental health? The counseling center?

• Evaluation
  – Gatekeeper training programs
    • Are they effective? To what extent? For which populations?
  – Communication/Marketing
    • Are messages being interpreted as intended?
    • How is the campaign being received?
Focus Groups: How To

• Goals of the study
  – What do you want to know? What is your research question?

• Develop a moderator’s guide
  – Develop open-ended questions, limited number of topics to guide conversation
  – Ground rules
  – What participants can expect
  – Approximately 90 minutes

• Sample
  – Typically 8-10 people
  – Sample will depend upon goal of the study
  – Saturation

• Capturing information
  – A/V recording
  – Note-taking

Benefits/Challenges

• Benefits
  – Gather information about:
    • Knowledge, attitude, beliefs
    • Barriers and facilitators to behavior
    • Insight into populations not represented in quantitative data samples
  – Test messages/marketing materials
  – Generate hypotheses and survey questions, investigate meaning of survey results

• Challenges
  – Small sample
  – Generalizing results
  – Recruiting
  – Facilitator bias
  – IRB approval
  – Time consuming data analysis
ACHA-NCHA

Q. 40E: In the last 12 months 36.2% of students reported they felt so depressed it was difficult to function.

- What else do you want to know about this?
- What qualitative research method would you use to learn more about the target population(s)?
- What groups or departments on campus would you target?

Questions to consider

- What are the hard to reach populations on your campus?
  - How could qualitative research help you to learn more about them?

- What do you know about the attitudes and beliefs about suicide and mental health on your campus? Barriers and facilitators to help-seeking?

- How could qualitative data be incorporated into program evaluation?
References


